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## THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

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### Part 71 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | April 17, 2011

*Luke 17:20–37*

<sup>20</sup> Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed,<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

<sup>22</sup> And he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.<sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them.<sup>24</sup> For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.<sup>25</sup> But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.<sup>26</sup> Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.<sup>27</sup> They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,<sup>29</sup> but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—<sup>30</sup> so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> Remember Lot’s wife.<sup>33</sup> Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.<sup>34</sup> I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left.<sup>35</sup> There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.”<sup>37</sup> And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF ELLA MAE

Our eternal life does not begin on the day we die; rather, it begins on the day that we meet Jesus and it alters the course of our life. It then ushers us through this life into something called the kingdom of God. Ultimately, that’s our eternal destination according to the teaching of the Bible. And today in Luke 17:20–37, Jesus is addressing the issue of the coming of the kingdom of God. And it’s a big idea that’s predominant and prevalent throughout much of the Scriptures. And lots of people debate over how Jesus is going to come back and when Jesus is going to come back and exactly how the details will play out. And lots of arguments rage about the nature and essence and details of the kingdom of God.

And so I thought it might be helpful to make it a little bit more practical and introduce you to my newest friend, somebody I had the privilege and honor of meeting yesterday and looking at the kingdom of God in the life of one little girl. Her name is, fantastically enough, Ella Mae, best name ever.

My son, Zachariah Blaise Driscoll, buddy Zac, had a baseball tournament yesterday in eastern Washington over in Wenatchee. So buddy Zac and I drove over and while hanging out at the baseball fields watching him, the Acts 29 church planter from that town came to visit and hang out for the course of the day. Great guy, wonderful guy with a great church.

And if you’re new, the Acts 29 Network is our church-planting network. We give 10 percent of all of our dollars to Acts 29 and we help plant churches. So there are four hundred Acts 29 churches in the U.S., five hundred potential church planters being assessed continually, and we love church planting.

And so this young man came to hang out for the day and he brought his daughter, Ella Mae. She’s about five years old with brown hair, big eyes. She’s really smart. She’s hilariously funny and exceedingly cute. And if the guys have got the photo, I’ll show her to you. I snapped this on my iPhone. As you can see, she’s got a walker because she has spina bifida.

And I’m not an expert on this by any stretch of the imagination, but as I understand it, that means her spine is external to her body. There are some serious biological, neurological complications and implications for her condition. The lifespan is into the teens or twenties. I guess in part because a lot of fluid collects in the brain. She showed us over dinner last night as we were eating chips and salsa that she had a shunt put in with a drainage cord that goes down her neck. Her daddy, with tears in his eyes, explained that that will perhaps extend her life course into her thirties, if Jesus doesn’t heal her, something that we’re praying for.

When I first met her, she had her little walker and was at the little league field and she’s just really fun and really cute. And I noticed she had a brace on one leg and she had a pink cast on the other. And she has no functionality below the waist, so bowel movements, standing up, walking, is not possible for her. But she’s the most happy, conversant, pleasant little girl you could ever meet. And I wanted to buy her candy. So I got down on one knee, “Ella

Mae, my name is Pastor Mark.” And she said, “Pastor Mark, you are more handsome in person than you are on the computer.” So she has the spiritual gift of discernment, obviously. And I looked at her, I said, “You need candy.” So I picked her up and I carried her over to the snack shack and gave her some money and we got her some candy. And I just got to visit with her and she is a wonderful little girl.

And now what’s interesting about Ella Mae is that she’s already experienced the kingdom of God. The theologians, when they talk about the kingdom of God, they’ll talk about the already but not yet. That the kingdom of God is started, but it’s not yet concluded. It’s in process, but it’s not fully done. And she’s experienced the kingdom of God. Ella Mae’s a Christian, she loves Jesus. She’s been born again, she has a new heart, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit radiates joy through her in a remarkable way. Her countenance and her disposition are a compelling sermon.

Buddy Zac and I took her and her family out to dinner last night and afterward I asked Zac a question that I ask my kids a lot, “So what did you learn today?” And buddy Zac said, “I learned that if you love Jesus, you don’t have to be bitter even if your life is hard. You can still have joy.” Now that’s a great lesson for an eleven-year-old boy to observe from a five-year-old girl. And he really liked her. She told him, “Zac, you’re very cool.” So Zac thinks she’s pretty awesome too.

And it was interesting as we were having dinner with her, you can see that the kingdom of God has begun in her life, her sins are forgiven, she belongs to Jesus, she’s filled with the Holy Spirit, she has a daddy who’s a pastor. And he absolutely adores and loves her. And in the providence of God, she has a wonderful, believing mother who’s a nurse by trade. And so she has the best physical and spiritual care that perhaps a little girl in her condition can have.

And as we walked into the restaurant, I noticed that everyone came to her. She knew all of the workers, all of the servers, and the owner. And she, with her walker, would put it out, and then drag her legs along because they’re not functional. She holds herself up by her arms and then would reach up with one hand and hug everyone and greet them. She’s a citizen of the kingdom of God, she’s a servant of the kingdom of God, and she brings the presence of the kingdom of God with her. She’s lovely.

She’s still waiting, though, for the conclusion of the kingdom of God. That one day she, like you and I, will die. And her body, your body, my body, will go into the ground and our soul will go to be with the Lord in a place called heaven. We don’t reside there forever. There is a day upon the second coming of Jesus, the return of our King, when our body and soul reunite and as Jesus resurrected from death, so we too rise in a new body to live on a new earth, free of sin and all its effects. Just like Jesus rose. And that will be the culmination of the kingdom of God and that’ll be the final experience of the children of God, including Ella Mae.

So the kingdom of God has begun in her life and there is still more to come. And in the meantime, she’s journeying, she’s venturing toward the kingdom of God. And she has trials and tests, as we all do, along the way. The most recent was not long ago. Her daddy, with tears in his eyes, explained that—she said, “Daddy, my hands are very tingly,” and then all of a sudden, they became paralyzed. “And Daddy, my arms are very tingly.” And they became paralyzed. She’s already paralyzed from the waist down, and now she’s having neurological complications from her spine that are causing her arms to become paralyzed as well.

Well, her daddy, obviously terrified, put her in the truck and made the almost-three-hour drive to Seattle in an hour and twenty minutes to get her to Children’s Hospital, where they performed an emergency surgery on her. And she reported to me, she was telling me the story. She came around to sit near me, which was my day’s highlight. I said, “Well, what did you do?” She said, “I was very scared. But then when they did the surgery, I woke up, I could move my hands so the first thing I did is I stretched them out and I said, ‘Praise the Lord,’” as an act of worship. That’s Ella Mae.

And so as we were visiting last night over Mexican food, she started telling me that one day she plans on being a ballerina. A ballerina. Now God could heal her in this life, but no matter what, in the kingdom of God, upon the resurrection of the dead and the full healing of the body, Ella Mae is going to be a ballerina. See, that’s the full unveiling of the kingdom of God. And I already asked Jesus, “Can I please have a front-row ticket? I want to see Ella Mae dance for the first time.”

And as a further evidence of the kingdom of God, in telling that story today, a gal at Mars Hill who loves Jesus and is a ballet dancer for the Pacific Northwest Ballet said, “Next time Ella Mae is in town for a surgery,” which will be shortly, “we’d love to have her come to the ballet and meet all the ballerinas.” So that’s going to be her little treat.

Ella Mae is one story of one little girl who’s wonderful. She has Jesus as her King, she’s a citizen of the kingdom, she’s on a kingdom mission to share the love of Jesus. She’s experienced the kingdom of God already, but it’s not yet completed in her life. There will be a day that Ella Mae rises from death and dances with Jesus as a ballerina.

And it’s important for us when we think of the kingdom of God to think of people whom Jesus loves and lives that he changes and eternities that he alters. And sometimes it becomes massive theological conjecture and speculation, as opposed to the simplicity that when we get to Jesus, everything’s going to be okay. The world as we know it is going to come to an end and Jesus is going to remove sin and all of its effects and usher in a perfect world that never ends, the kingdom of God.

## **JESUS IS THE KING**

And the kingdom of God starts with a king. You can’t have a kingdom without a king. You cannot have a kingdom without a king. And so God’s people in the Bible had been told through the prophets for many generations that God himself was coming as a king. So they were waiting with expectation and anticipation for the coming of a king, someone who would make it all better, someone who would set aside sin and put down suffering

and bring blessing and life where there's been sadness and sorrow.

And see, when God was done with the world, he said that everything was very good, and we sinned against God and as a result, everything has gone very bad. A president won't fix it, a politician won't fix it. We need a king, a great, benevolent, generous, kind, merciful, authoritative, loving, humble king. That's what the world needs.

And so God's people started getting prophecies from God's servants about the coming of a king. And one of the most popular was in Daniel 7:13–14. And the reason I'm going to share this with you in a moment is it's very important to the backdrop of our section on Jesus as king and the kingdom of God in Luke 17:20–37. In that small section, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man four times. It's an office or a designation that he ascribes to himself. It's his favorite title and designation. The Lord Jesus refers to himself some eighty times in the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—as the Son of Man. And those who knew the Old Testament knew that he was lifting language given hundreds of years prior from Daniel 7:13–14, where we read that Jesus is the king.

Here's what Daniel prophesied. "I saw in the night visions." Sometimes God speaks through visions. He oftentimes in the Bible, not frequently to everyone, but to particular leaders, gives them visions. He gives them knowledge of the future because God is sovereign over history. In a few occasions in my life, I've had visions where God shows me something very specific in the future. It's not at the level of authority as the Bible. We don't believe it happens frequently. But God sometimes just does show us something that we need to know so that we can prepare for the future. And he does that here with Daniel. It's called a vision.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man," right? Make note of that. Jesus is going to use that title. "And he came to the Ancient of Days," that is, God the Father, "and was presented before him." And here's all the language of this king and his kingdom. "And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom," there it is, "that all peoples," regardless of nation or race or political persuasion or sexual orientation or religious predisposition, "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Jesus is a king. He's the King of kings. And Daniel has a vision where God the Father, the Ancient of Days, takes one like the Son of Man, this is Jesus Christ before his birth on earth because he preexisted eternally as God, and sends him to a sin-fallen, rebellious world on a kingdom mission as the Son of Man. God coming as a man into human history on a rescue mission for his enemies. And he's coming as a king and he's coming to establish a kingdom that rules over all peoples, times, places, circumstances, and that his kingdom would never end and that it would be nothing but good all the time for all of its citizens.

And it's a big vision and it's amazing, isn't it, that so many of our epic cultural narratives and films and storylines are built on this big idea, that things are not the way they ought to be. What we really need is a king to come and make everything better. When we're little kids, we read the fairytales and we use our imagination and little boys dress up like kings and warriors and princes. They pretend that they have dominion, that they're going to slay giants and dragons and enemies. All of that's the heart of the Bible.

Sometimes when we grow up, we lose our imagination; as a result, we don't worship as well as we ought. The story of the Bible is that we have a great enemy who's a dragon, there's a war between a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness. The people have believed lies and fallen into sin and joined the enemy in his battle against God. And that God is coming into human history as a king to defeat evil, to liberate people, and to bring a kingdom that never ends, filled with nothing but love and joy, peace and grace, goodness and mercy, where Jesus dances with Ella Mae. That's the heart of the Bible.

## JESUS' KINGDOM IS COMING

Now Jesus comes along and he says, "That's me." Some people say that Jesus never claimed to be God. He did repeatedly. He did emphatically. He did absolutely. And here he's saying, "That's me." This eternal king. We read of this in Luke 17:20–25. We'll read about not only Jesus being a king, but Jesus' kingdom is coming into human history. The world as we know it is going to come to an end and then the kingdom of God will be unveiled forever.

"Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come," well, the Pharisees are the religious guys. Usually their questions are setups for Jesus. This is actually a decent, fair question. "He answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed,'" we'll talk about that. "'Nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'" He says, "You want to see the kingdom? My name is Jesus. I'm the King. It all starts right here."

"And he said to the disciples, 'The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man,'" where is that from? Daniel 7. "'And you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man,'" back to Daniel, "'be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.'"

Jesus here is talking about the kingdom of God. He speaks of the kingdom of God roughly twenty-seven times in Luke's gospel. "The kingdom of God," one theologian says rightly, "is the people of God, in the place of God, under the rule of God." So the kingdom of God begins in this life and it's ultimately fulfilled upon the second coming of Jesus.

And what Jesus is saying—they come to him and they have a very good question, perhaps it's a question that you've had as well, "Where's the

kingdom?" How many of you have read the Bible? You say, "You know what? No more Satan, sin, death. No more war, atrocity. Jesus wipes every tear from our eyes. No one goes hungry. Soldiers are out of a job. We don't need locks on our home, airbags on our cars. We don't need walkers for little girls." Praise God for all these things that make life bearable on the earth. But if there is a day that is forthcoming, when all of these things are no longer needed because sin and our enemy and the effects of sin and the works of our enemy are removed forever, bring the kingdom, sounds great. Especially if you love Jesus. Jesus is in charge, perfect. I vote to never vote again. Give me the King. Just he can take it from here and I'll be happy.

## **1. THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES PATIENTLY**

How many of you have had that feeling in your heart? Jesus, why the suffering? Why the wars? Why the poverty? Why the atrocity? Why so long? It's because, friends, God is patient. The Bible says elsewhere, Peter writes, that God is not slow but rather God is patient.

And what can happen is for those of us who are Christians, as soon as we become a Christian, we feel like God should be done with his work, right? "All right, God, you saved me. Great, let's just finish now. Don't save any more people or unroll any more history. I've got a first-class ticket. Let's just board the plane and fly somewhere else."

Aren't you glad, though, that Jesus didn't cease his work the day before you got saved? You're like, "Yeah, I appreciate that." All right, then be patient as he's working on other people, he's unveiling the rest of history. He has a plan. He knows exactly what he's doing. He's not slow, he is, rather, patient.

And so they come to the Lord Jesus and they say, "We really want this kingdom. It sounds pretty fantastic. And if you really are the king that you say you are, where's your kingdom?" And they miss it because Jesus comes two times. The first time he comes in humility, the second time he comes in glory. The first time he comes born of a virgin, in a small town. He grows up in a small town with a teenage mother and a blue-collar working-class construction worker father. He's homeless, he's poor, his life is simple. The first time Jesus comes, he comes to identify with us, to live without sin, and to die for us.

That's exactly what he says, "first he must suffer many things and be rejected by his generation." Jesus says, "Before we get to the kingdom, we have to go through the cross. Before we can have the resurrection of the dead and the eternal kingdom to come, I need to atone for sin." At this point in his journey, from Luke 9:51 forward, he is venturing toward Jerusalem where he is going to suffer and die in our place, for our sins, as our substitute and our Savior. So Jesus is saying, "There is no kingdom without a cross."

This is where I get very frustrated with those who would skip the cross and go to the kingdom. "Let's just help people and do nice things and just live and get along and have a better world." We believe in that, through Jesus. Apart from Jesus, there is no unity. Apart from Jesus, there's not true generosity. Apart from Jesus, there is no real kingdom because sin is the problem and it must be dealt with. And Jesus comes to go to the cross, to deal with our sin so the kingdom of God might begin in our life and in our midst and then we venture together as the people of God toward the kingdom of God. And through our own death, we experience resurrection and new life as totally redeemed, new people on a new earth. And there's the kingdom of God.

So Jesus is saying, "You can't just have the kingdom, you need to go through the cross." You can't just have a better world, we have to deal with sin. And once he deals with sin, it opens and unveils the opportunity of the coming of the kingdom. So Jesus comes the first time in humility, he will come the second time in glory.

Friends, Jesus did go to the cross, he did suffer, he did die, he did atone for the sin of the world, he did rise from death. We celebrate that every Easter and every Sunday, which is the day of Jesus' resurrection. He ascended back into heaven; Revelation says, forty-five times in twenty-two chapters, that he's seated on a throne. That is a king. It says as well that he is the King of kings.

And Jesus will return. Friends, we know not when, but we know he will. And when he does, all who are dead will rise, stand before him for judgment to go to heaven or hell, into the kingdom, or into condemnation. And that's the story of human history. And so the second time we see Jesus return to the earth, it will be in glory, not in poverty, but in riches. Not powerless but powerful. Not to suffer but to triumph.

Revelation uses the most magnificent language. He's like a soldier, a warrior on a white horse riding into battle to defeat Satan, sin, death, and hell. It's as big an epic as every little boy who's ever played with swords could possibly imagine. So let your boys play with swords, not real ones, fake ones. All they're doing is acting as image bearers of God. Dragon-slaying, sword-carrying, kingdom warriors. That's our Jesus. He'll come again in glory.

And Jesus says that the kingdom comes patiently. It doesn't come quickly. We've been waiting two thousand years. Two thousand years ago, the question was: Is it time? Jesus, is the kingdom ready? It's kind of like a little kid in the back of a car on the way to vacation with a family. "Are we there yet?" "No, it'll be two thousand years. Just wait," right? "Plug in your Gameboy, the battery's definitely not going to last for this trip." They're asking Jesus two thousand years ago, "Okay, Jesus, you say we're going to the kingdom. Sounds great. Are we there yet?" No. The kingdom of God comes patiently. So we need to be patient.

## **2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES UNEXPECTEDLY**

Number two, the kingdom of God, Jesus says, comes unexpectedly. He says it doesn't come with a lot of signs and fanfare. It's not like before Jesus returns and the kingdom of God is unveiled and we stand before God for judgment, all of a sudden, you know, there's just banners in the sky, "Tomorrow at noon, he's coming back. Note to self, get ready." It's not like that. And so what we need to do is always live preparedly, that if Jesus came back right now, we'd be ready to meet him and stand before him and give an account to him.

Now, what this means is most of the garbage sold in Christian bookstores is wrong, the stuff about the end times. Because what people try to do is exactly what Jesus said we were not supposed to do and that's take all the signs and try and put them together and predict when the end would be.

People have been doing this since the days of the New Testament. The Thessalonians did this. They told all their stuff, they put together charts, sold books, freaked everybody out, sold canned goods and bottled water and huddled up and low and behold, two thousand years later, swing and a miss. They didn't get it right. He didn't come back in their lifetime as they were expecting. So Paul tells them, "Go get a job, go to work. It's going to be a while. Hang in there. There's still kingdom work to be done." So he says it won't be with lots of signs.

Now some of you are too involved in what we'll call eschatology, which is the study of last things. You'll find somebody who reads the newspaper and, you know, follows all of the news reports and then pulls it all together and pulls something out of context from Daniel and something really scary from Jeremiah and next thing you know, you're buying a book at the Christian bookstore and you're having nightmares and you're freaking out, you know? And Jesus says it's not going to be like that.

We're in that time now too; over two hundred different professing Christians have predicted the end of the world. The latest of which is a guy who predicts it'll be next month. I think he's predicting May 21. He predicted it once before in 1994, obviously that didn't go as well as he was anticipating. So he's predicted May 21. So here's what I would recommend. And there are billboards everywhere and they're on CNN and it's a big whatever-whatever. On May 20, I'm going to plant a tree. And on May 22, I'm going to get my photo taken in front of the billboard they have purchased in downtown Seattle with a smirk on my face.

Because you don't know when Jesus is coming back. We don't know when Jesus is coming back. And it doesn't matter if they have a chart. Jesus isn't looking at the chart saying, "Well, that's not what I was thinking, but it's on the chart. It looked very official, a committee met and took a vote. I guess I got to come back then." He really doesn't care about our charts.

### **3. THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMES OBVIOUSLY**

He says that the kingdom comes patiently, unexpectedly, and it does come obviously, right? 'Cause every once in a while you'll hear, "Oh, you know, I hear that the kingdom of God is dawning here and maybe Jesus is coming back and it looks like we're getting to the end." It's not like that. It comes quickly, suddenly, obviously. Jesus says it's like lightning in the sky when he comes back.

Have you ever seen a good lightning storm? I can still remember the first one I saw as a little boy, in Grand Forks, North Dakota. I was at my grandma's house and I was maybe ten years of age and we're out on the plains in the middle of nowhere on the old farmstead of the family. And it was dark out and thunder just hit and shook the home. It freaked me out. I mean, I looked out the window, I could still remember, my grandma was by the sink, and I look out her kitchen window and then lightning just exploded out of the sky and lit everything up.

Jesus is saying his return and the unveiling of the kingdom of a God will be like that. You won't need anyone to say, "Hey, there was lightning last night." "Yeah, I know. We all saw it and felt it. It was obvious. It was apparent, it was clear. It wasn't off to the side and only a few people saw it and then they had to give a report about it."

The second coming of Jesus Christ, the unveiling of the kingdom of God, the judgment of the living and the dead, it will be suddenly, unexpectedly, obviously. That's the way it's going to be. Jesus is a king and Jesus' kingdom is coming.

## **WILL YOU ENTER JESUS' KINGDOM OR BE CONDEMNED?**

So here's the question for you. The question for you is, will you enter Jesus' kingdom or be condemned? When Jesus returns, will you be ready to meet him? Will you be a citizen of his kingdom? Will you be one who is loyal to him as king or not? And so Jesus gives us two examples from history of people who had an invitation to be citizens of his kingdom and one was a negative and one was a positive example.

We'll start with the negative example in Luke 17:32-37 with a woman named Lot's wife. I'll read you the story. Jesus says, "Remember Lot's wife." Now let me just stop right there. That seems like enough information. We'll just unpack that for a minute. "Remember Lot's wife."

Now what Jesus is going to do, he's going to talk about Lot's wife, who got turned into a pillar of salt, and then Noah, who built a huge boat that floated through a flood. And what tends to happen is some people, we'll call them critics, and they're into something called higher criticism. These are, quote unquote, "scholars," which means educated beyond your intelligence.

And what they tend to do is they tend to look at the Bible and anytime they see something that is supernatural and/or miraculous, they immediately dismiss and discount it, saying miracles can't happen. It's because they believe in something called a naturalistic worldview that has been purported in previous generations by philosophers like Hume, who said that the world is basically a closed system that runs according to laws, and whether or not there is a God, he never supernaturally intervenes in history and does anything miraculous. As a result, miracles are de facto dismissed.

And as Christians, we say, "No, there is a God and he shows up and does supernatural things. We call them miracles because they're unusual. They don't happen a lot, but they do happen." And some of these things are like Lot's wife and Noah, which we'll read about today, and Jonah being in the belly of a fish for three days.

And these kinds of things, curiously enough, are the exact things that Jesus says happened. Jesus doesn't say, "Remember the mythical archetypal story surrounding a woman named Lot's wife." What he says is "Remember Lot's wife, that real lady who really got turned into salt. Remember her." Here's what I am telling you. Jesus is a teacher. There are other teachers. If those teachers disagree with Jesus, go with Jesus. I know he's not at your

community college, but he's got a better resume than your professor. That's what I'm saying. That's what I'm saying.

## **REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE**

Remember Lot's wife. She's a negative example. He goes on to say, "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

The story of Lot's wife, if you want to read more thoroughly, comes from Genesis 19. There was an area called Sodom and Gomorrah. You've probably heard of it. It was an area notoriously filled with sin and rebellion, particularly sexual sin of all sorts and kinds. They probably called it tolerance, diversity, had a parade, but God called it an abomination. You know, different people have different perspectives on these things. And so God called it an abomination and it got to the point in Sodom and Gomorrah where their tolerance, diversity, and alternative lifestyle was so horrendous that even when strangers would show up in town, they would surround them, demand they come out of the house so they could be gang-raped. And God looked at it and realized no one's going to repent, no one's going to change, we need to put an end to this, this just needs to stop, it's a horrible atrocity. And so God tells everyone, "Look, I'm going to send literally fire and brimstone, road tar from heaven."

Now there's one believing family there and I use the word believing very lightly. It's Lot, who's the head of household; his daughters, who have some serious issues if you keep reading the story; and also his wife, right? They are not elder material, we'll just say that. And what happens is God tells them, "Look, I am going to incinerate Sodom and Gomorrah. You are living there in the midst of this worldliness and sin. I need you to pack your bags and get out of town before everything starts falling out of the sky and your lives are taken." There's no sense of real urgency among Lot and his family. They don't move very quickly. God basically has to escort them out of town.

And just in the nick of time, before God incinerates and judges these people, they are venturing from the world into a new life that God has for them—and this is all sort of a big picture of what God does in our salvation. He takes us from worldliness and sin, and he delivers us in the nick of time to a new life. Lot's wife turns her back on her family, essentially on God, and looks back. And she doesn't just look back, she longs back. She misses her old way of life. She really loved Sodom and Gomorrah, perhaps more than she even loved the Lord. She wanted to go back to her old lifestyle.

Are you like that? Are you someone whom God is trying to deliver from a life of sin, folly, rebellion, and death, that God has you surrounded with people who belong to him, maybe friends, family, coworkers, community group, and he's trying to move you from the world to the kingdom, from an old way of life, to a new way of life, from condemnation to salvation. But in your heart, you miss your sin. You miss your old days and your old ways. You look back, you long back, maybe you've even gone back. You're doing things you should not be doing, believing things you should not be believing, condoning things that you should be condemning. Is that you? If so, Jesus says, "Remember Lot's wife." Remember Lot's wife. Don't look back, don't long back, don't go back. Some of you are like that.

Now let me say this about true and false Christians. True Christians have conflicted desires. True Christians are really tempted. True Christians are walking toward the kingdom of God, but the world looks pretty intriguing and there are days that we're sorely tempted to look back, long back, go back. There are days when we sin. We need to repent and then move forward again with Jesus and his people. But for the true Christian, though they have conflicted desires, their deepest desire is for Jesus and the kingdom of God and holiness and obedience. That's our deepest desire. We'll have conflicted desires, but if you're a believer, I would tell you go with your deepest desire.

For those who are non-believers, for those who are non-Christians, they too will have temptation and conflicted desire, but their deepest desire, down deep in the roots, is going to be for worldliness, not the kingdom; for sin, not holiness; for death, not life; for condemnation, not salvation. I don't know whether or not you're a believer, but I give that to you to ask yourself the sincere question, "What are my deepest desires?"

And when I counsel with people, I ask them. They'll say, "I'm being tempted by this and I'm sorely longing for this sin." What's your deepest desire? And when I hear, "Well, my deepest desire is to walk with Jesus and his people and get to the kingdom of God." You're a believer, go with your deepest desire. "My deepest desire is to go back to the world, to go back to sin, to go back to death." Perhaps you are an unbeliever and what you need is a new nature with new appetites and new desires. Perhaps you've never really met Jesus and been born again as a true citizen of Jesus your king, and a member of his kingdom. Mars Hill is here to help you sort those things out in conversation in something we call community groups, where people talk and pray and eat and do life together and untangle the knot that is our soul.

Remember Lot's wife. Are you like her? Are you like her? See this all the time. "I'm walking with Jesus, but I miss my old boyfriend. I'm walking with Jesus, I miss my old girlfriend. I'm walking with Jesus, but I miss my old entertainment. I'm walking with Jesus, but I miss my old substances. I'm walking with Jesus, but I miss my old addictions." Keep going to the kingdom of God. It's nothing but fire and brimstone falling on what you have left.

## **REMEMBER THE STORY OF NOAH**

Number two, Jesus gives an example from Noah and he says that the story of Noah is true. He says it in Luke 17:26–31. He uses Noah as a positive example and he's saying we need look at Noah and understand that what happened in the day of Noah is going to happen again in the end, that Noah was a foreshadowing of the end of the world and the coming of a new world. Because the day of Noah was about the judgment of sin and then the ushering of a new world on the other side of a flood. Jesus is going to return, there will be judgment, and a new world that awaits us, not on the other side of water, but then fire.

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man." Again, he quotes Daniel 7 and applies it to himself. "They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise,

just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all.” Judgment. “So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 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.”

He says, “Remember the story of Noah,” so let me tell you the story of Noah, and if you want to pick it up, you can start in a place like Genesis 6. And Jesus is a Bible teacher and so he teaches from the Old Testament and he shows how it reveals to us the future.

And the story of Noah is this. The world was filled with sin and God was going to judge the world, in that day through water, in a future day through fire. And God was patient. He sent prophets telling them to repent and warning them of coming judgment, that you would need to experience salvation to get through the judgment into a new world. That’s exactly what’s going to happen in the future. God has pronounced judgment on sin and sinners, an end of this world as we know it. He’s provided a means of salvation. In their day, it was through the ark and today our ark is Jesus Christ. And through that salvation, you can be delivered from the world that is destroyed into a new world. For them, it was a cleaned, remade world. For us, it will be the eternal kingdom of God, the new earth.

And here’s the story of Noah. Noah lived in the desert and God told him to build a huge boat. Now, we read it and we say, “Well, of course he obeyed.” Seriously? Seriously. If you lived in the desert and you heard a voice telling you, “Build a huge boat,” right, you would not spend your money on wood, but rather medication. You’d say, “That’s it, I have lost my mind.”

Some commentators in Genesis—there is disagreement on this point, but some commentators say that it is possible that it had never yet rained on the earth. That would make it great faith. “What are you doing?” “Building a boat.” “Where?” “In the desert.” “Why?” “It’s going to rain.” “What is that?” All right, that’s a lot of faith.

So God tells Noah, “Build a big boat.” Not just a boat, basically a battleship. Next time you look at a container ship or a battleship think, “Noah built one of those with his sons.” It was big enough to hold 522 railroad cars. I did the math on it, so it’s probably wrong because I went to public school. But it’s 1.4 million cubic feet. That’s a big boat. What this means is it took Noah a long time to build a boat and it cost him a lot of money. I don’t know how much it cost to build one, but it’s expensive. All that wood, all those tools, all those days. The only helpers that he had that we have any awareness of were his sons.

Do you think anybody ever made fun of Noah? Mm-hmm, I would have and I’m a preacher, all right. He was just crazy. Can you imagine him being a bit of a tourist attraction? “Hey, welcome to town. You want to go see the guy building a boat in the desert? It’s awesome. Yeah, he ‘heard from the Lord.’ Ha, ha! Yep, sure he did, you know? He’s building it with his sons. Yeah, the whole family, not real smart, right? Corncob pipe, banjo. You get the picture.” You kind of get the idea that Noah’s the laughingstock and everybody’s making fun of him.

So what does Noah do? Every day, he gets up as an act of faith. He sits down to have his breakfast. Do you think there was ever a day Noah looked at his wife and said, “I really don’t feel like working on that boat today. It’s getting really expensive. It’s a whole lot of work and people come and make fun of me. And we do live in the desert. And even if it does rain, whatever that is, it seems like it would take a lot of rain to lift this battleship.”

Do you think his sons ever came up to him and said, “You know, Dad, it’s kind of hard meeting girls with this whole boat thing. Not a lot of girls want to marry the boat kid. And by the way, Dad, you’re taking all of our money and all of our inheritance and all of our family future and possessions and legacy and you’re buying tools and wood and building a boat.”

But every day, in faith Noah got up and he worked on the boat. The Bible says in addition to being a boat builder, Peter says in the New Testament, Noah was, quote, “A preacher of righteousness.” So he’s a prophet. He’s saying, “Repent, judgment’s coming! The end of the world is coming! The world as we know it is coming to an end! Repent, turn to God. The problem is sin! God has a means of salvation. Turn to him, trust in him. Get on my boat.” No one, no one, no one believed him.

And the day comes where the construction of the boat is completed. Noah and his family get on the boat and it starts to what? It starts to rain. It keeps raining. And the rain gets harder and harder, steadier and steadier. Next thing you know, there’s reports of flash flooding. Next thing you know, there’s a lot of water. Next thing you know, the boat starts rising.

And Jesus tells us what people were doing. They’re going to the grocery store. They’re doing their laundry. All right, they’re returning their e-mail. They’re running errands. They’re trying to figure out what place settings they should have at their wedding, none of which are bad things, but they’re not the first priority.

How many of you are like that? You really haven’t given much thought or consideration to Jesus, the end of your life, the end of the world, the kingdom of God, heaven and hell, the big issues. Instead, it’s down your list of priorities. You’re saying, “Well, I got to do the dishes, I got to cook dinner, I got to do the laundry, I got to cut the grass, I got to return my e-mail. And then I went to hell. At least I was wearing clean socks.” Think about it. Most people are far more prepared for a vacation than they are for eternal life. They think about it, prepare for it, plan in advance. Have you done that for forever? Are you ready to stand before God? Have you had your sin dealt with through Jesus or will you face judgment?

Noah and his family by faith trusted in the Lord, entered the ark, the means of salvation that God gave to deliver them from judgment to a new world. For us, that ark is Jesus Christ, our humble servant king. They’re on the boat. The door is open. It’s one of the most horrifying pictures in the Bible. The water level’s rising. Family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, Noah’s a preacher of righteousness. “Repent, repent, join us! Please come with us!

Judgment is coming! Flee from the wrath to come!” No one comes and Noah knows that they’re all going to die in the flood because they were too busy to be reconciled to God.

And in one of the most haunting statements, the Bible says that God closed the door to the ark. I don’t know why this is. Perhaps it is because Noah could not bring himself to no longer provide an opportunity for people to be saved from judgment. Or perhaps it is because it is God himself who determines the day at which his offer of grace comes to an end and all that remains is judgment.

Friends, you and I have a day when the proverbial door of opportunity shuts. You’re going to die and you know not when. Today, the door is open, so we’re inviting you to Jesus, we’re inviting you to salvation, we’re inviting you to avoiding punishment, judgment, wrath, hell, and condemnation. The door is open. That’s a gracious gift. For some of you, God has been waiting a long time and you’ve still not yet come. And we would compel you to come. There will be a day upon your death or the second coming of Jesus, whichever happens first, that the door of opportunity shuts and judgment and justice is all that remains.

Jesus says believe that. In the days of Noah, they didn’t believe that until it was too late. And Jesus is saying that you and I can respond to his invitation in one of three ways. Like those in the days of Noah, saying, “I’m busy, I’m not interested. I don’t think judgment is coming. I don’t think death is inevitable. I don’t think God is going to do anything.” And you will regret that decision.

Or like Lot’s wife, we venture toward the kingdom of God, but then we go back into a pattern of sin and we suffer and those who love us suffer as she suffered and her daughters suffered and her husband suffered. We cause others to suffer as well as ourselves.

Or we respond like Noah and his family. We take the ridicule and rebuke of being Christians. We invest the labor and the money that it is required for obedience to God, and by faith we trust that the Word of God is true and that the judgment of God is coming.

## THE GRACE OF GOD

And some of you will ask, “How can I receive what Noah received: salvation?” And I’ll close in Genesis 6 and I’ll tell you how God saved Noah and it’s how God saves everyone whom he saves. And if you were here when I went through Genesis some years ago—and I had a great year teaching through the book of Genesis and one of the things I love about Mars Hill is I get to teach the Bible and you guys are a teachable people. And as we were going through Genesis, looking at the story of Noah, if you will remember if you were here, I lost my mind a little bit because the story of Noah is usually butchered.

The story of Noah is usually told that everybody was bad except for one guy named Noah. So all the bad guys had to swim and Noah got a boat. Be a good guy and you get a boat named Jesus. That’s kind of how the story’s told. And that becomes moralism and religion and what we’ll call works righteousness, that God hates bad people and God loves good people. The truth is the world is filled with bad people and Jesus.

And so here’s how we read it in Genesis 6, back to the days of Noah, where Jesus is teaching from. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . And it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land . . . for I am sorry that I have made them.’”

God made us in his image and likeness to reflect his goodness and glory, his love, mercy, truth, compassion. Much like a mirror reflects our image, we are to be mirrors reflecting the goodness of God. And instead, we’ve all sinned, we’ve rebelled. The inclination of our hearts, we’re only evil all the time. This is the theological doctrine of total depravity. We’re selfish and self-centered and self-seeking and self-serving. We think nothing of God and the well being of others. It’s deep down in the roots. It’s only, continually, all the time our predisposition because of our sinful condition.

And what does it do? It breaks the heart of God. Friends, you need to know this, that when we sin, it is not just breaking the laws of God, it is. Furthermore, it is the breaking of the heart of God, much like a parent who loves a child. When the child disobeys, it’s not only the breaking of law or a rule, it is the breaking of the parent’s heart. God is a Father and when we sin, we break the rules and we break his heart.

And so in the days of Noah, God knew that no one would repent, that no one would change, that no one would stop. And so he had to put a stop to it through a flood. Everyone was only evil all the time. “Everyone” includes a man named Noah. He was a sinner just like everyone else.

And why did he get spared? We read, “But Noah found,” what? “Favor in the eyes of the Lord.” Jesus says elsewhere that this was originally penned by Moses, in a language called Hebrew. And that word for favor is our word *grace*, the same name that my wife’s parents gave her, one of the most important words in all of Christianity, *grace*. Noah was bad like everyone else. He was a sinner. He deserved condemnation, death, hell, and the wrath of God. Say, “Why didn’t he get that?” God gave him grace. That’s unmerited, undeserving, ill-deserving. God just decided to love Noah, not because he was lovely or loveable, but because God is loving. To give him mercy and grace, to give him what he doesn’t deserve, to spare him when he could condemn him.

Friends, all of us who are Christians—and we would beg you who are not Christians to come to Jesus and become a Christian today—we’re saved by grace. It’s not what we do, it’s what Jesus does. It’s not who we are, it’s who Jesus is. We don’t save ourselves. God saves us by grace. If you’re here and you say, “You know what, Christians are no better than me,” we agree! Some of us are worse. And it’s not about who’s good and bad because we’re all bad. It’s about who receives grace and who receives justice. For the Christian, Jesus received the justice on the cross so that we could receive the grace.

If you don’t receive the grace of God in Jesus Christ, then all that awaits you is justice. And don’t mock it and don’t risk it. They did that in the days of



Noah and Jesus says to learn from their example. If you are saved, you're saved by the grace of God. You are kept by the grace of God. You are sustained by the grace of God. That allows us to rejoice, not in ourselves, but that we have found favor in the eyes of God.

Jesus is a king. His kingdom is coming. The question is, are you ready for Jesus' kingdom or will you be condemned? I leave that decision to you and I love you very much and the door is still open, though one day it will close. That day could be today and I want you to have a sense of urgency about turning from sin and trusting in Jesus as humble servant king. I'll pray.

Father God, thank you for the Scriptures. We love your Word. Your Word is truth, just like Jesus says. Jesus, we thank you that you're a king. You're the Son of Man sent by the Ancient of Days on a rescue mission that we might find favor in your eyes. Lord Jesus, thank you that you came humbly and that you're coming again in glory. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that the world as we know it will come to an end. Sin will cease, suffering will cease. Death will be no more. Injustice, tyranny, poverty, God it is coming to an end when the king returns and the kingdom is unveiled. And so, Lord Jesus, I pray for my friends that today, this day, when the day of salvation is made possible and the door is still open, that we would respond by faith as Noah did to trust you, to endure the criticism and the ostracism, to invest the money and the labor that is required to be a disciple and a follower, that we would not, like Lot's wife, long back, look back, go back, that we would not, like the people in the days of Noah, tragically, sadly, but foolishly be so consumed with secondary, tertiary things that we die and go to hell with our inbox cleaned out, clean socks on our feet, and food in our fridge, but no grace for our soul. And God, thank you that there will be the resurrection of the dead and thank you that Ella Mae is going to be a ballerina. In Jesus' name, amen.

*[End of Audio]*

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*