

DISCIPLES LONG FOR JESUS'S COMING

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God's kingdom is present today and will be established in full when Christ returns.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Matthew 24; Luke 17

+ **SETTING:**

Sometimes we can wonder when things are ever going to change. If Jesus's disciples live according to the values, norms, and conditions of the kingdom, and if they are going to the lost with the good news, then when will the arrival of the kingdom come? Shouldn't we see a more dramatic impact than what is going on today? Since the kingdom is going to come differently than expected (Matthew 13), Jesus prepares us for the arrival of the kingdom as both already among us and not yet fully here.

DAY 1

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:20-24

NOTES

In 2011, a well-known Christian radio host stated publicly that the rapture and judgment day would occur at precisely 6 p.m. on May 21, 2011. Six months later, he said, the end of the world would come. Soon after, billboards went up around North America, warning people of the coming judgment.

Yet many Christians rejected this assertion, planning Sunday worship for May 22 as normal. Many Christians denounced the date-setting as mere speculation and rejected it out of hand, citing Jesus's words in Matthew 24:36, saying that no one knows the date nor the hour.

As tempting as it is to scoff at those who set dates and times, as long as people have lived, they have looked for the end of the world. The longing for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done (Matthew 6:10-11a) are realities in every heart, for God has set eternity in the hearts of humanity (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Instead of looking for signs that the end of the world is coming, Jesus and His disciples taught that we should purify ourselves as we await the blessed hope of Jesus's coming. For when Christ appears, we will be like Him as we will see Him fully and completely as He is (1 John 3:2b-3).

In what ways do you need to purify your heart to prepare to see the Lord?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The vast majority of men are utterly deceived in their expectations with respect to the kingdom of God. They are waiting for signs which will never appear. They are looking for indications which they will never discover."¹

—J. C. Ryle (1816–1900)

DAY 2

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:22-24

NOTES

Lightning is beautiful to watch from a distance but terrifying up close. If you have ever been out in nature when a storm has swept through, you know how the flashes of lightning illumine the darkest sky and its thunder resounds with a reverberation that can rattle the bones. A storm that appears to be miles away can suddenly roll up with lightning traveling miles unexpectedly. Out of the blue, a bolt's strike and the clap of thunder can shake windows, wake sleeping babies, and terrify the strongest of men.

So it will be, Jesus says, when He comes again at the end of time. His return will be like lightning from the sky. With glory's strike and the clap of wonder, He will suddenly appear. There will be no doubt nor rumor that He has arrived. When He comes, no one will need a sign to know that He is coming. It will be as evident as a bolt of lightning announcing its presence with the crackling of the air.

To think about Jesus's second coming may seem pleasant from a distant observation, but consider that His return will be sudden and abrupt, bright and glorious, universal to all, and powerful in all of His glory. This is how the kingdom will arrive in all of its fullness—with the Son of Man gloriously and victoriously returning to rule and reign forever. Will we be ready?

How do you think you will react when the Lord returns?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:26-30

NOTES

It was an ordinary morning on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. New Yorkers went about their normal routines: children were taken to daycare, adults were heading off to work. Coffee shops were full, people were talking on their phones and getting ready for another day of work. Then, in the busyness of the morning, terrorists flew two planes into the World Trade Center, and in an unexpected turn of events, thousands of people lost their lives.

This was how the people of Noah's day were: eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, going on as if life would always be the same. But then, the rain fell and consumed the world. The same was true in Sodom. People were doing their everyday business, planting crops, building and renovating, and reveling, when suddenly fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and consumed everyone except Lot and his household.

Jesus said that when He comes again, people will be going about their lives as normal. Some people will be eating dinner, out for a walk, playing soccer, working in their office. The everyday, ordinary events will consume their attention when He will suddenly appear. And at that moment, the opportunity to turn and trust in Him will be no more. Judgment will have come, and they will be overtaken in that moment.

How have you responded to the Lord's warning that a day of judgment is coming?

DAY 4

READ:

Luke 17:20-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 17:20-21

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #77: CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the reign of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's mission is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the gospel through good works so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.

Sometimes it is difficult to grasp how the kingdom of God is already present but not yet fully realized. When we stop and consider the way we live, we realize that the pattern is not so foreign to our daily experiences.

Consider the periods of waiting that people often experience. In many places across North America, graduated licensing has been adopted. Recognizing that a beginner driver needs someone experienced with them, a learner starts off driving with another licensed driver beside them. After a certain period of time, the young driver has some of the restrictions lifted: they can drive alone, but not after dark; they can have others in the vehicle, but no one under a certain age. It isn't until they receive their full license that all restrictions are lifted.

Similarly, the period of engagement is a time of waiting. The question has been popped. The ring has been placed on the finger. The planning for the wedding day is underway. But the couple has not yet fully realized the joy of the security of the covenant of marriage.

In a greater way, believers have the promise of a certain future: Jesus has given us His Spirit as a down payment guaranteeing our future with Him (Ephesians 1:14). We are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places now (Colossians 3:1), but we have not yet seen Him face to face.

Yet we have the promise of a sure and certain future now. The promise that the kingdom will be ours in full one day means we can live with a heart full of assurance now and trust the Lord that there is a better day ahead.

How does the knowledge that the kingdom is here now give you hope for tomorrow?

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 24:45-51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 24:45-47

NOTES

Upon the news that my wife was expecting our first child, we were excited. The due date seemed far off at first, but so much had to be done. The baby's room had to get a new coat of paint and a fresh rug needed to be laid. Soon we purchased and assembled furniture, and each piece was put in the room. We began discussing various options for names and finally agreed. Meals were put into the freezer and plans were made to get some help for those first few weeks.

As the due date approached, I worked more closely from home. The hospital bag was packed and ready to be put into the car in a moment's notice. I would check in with my wife to see how she was feeling, calling on occasion and getting updates from her.

While life didn't go on hold, we had worked hard for the arrival of our first child. The days were counting down, so when the contractions began late in the middle of the night, we were ready to go to the hospital to welcome our new child. I was excited to meet this little person and felt so much love.

Christ's second coming should prompt us in a similar way. We do not wait with passivity, but we wait with eagerness and work as though the time is very short. Because we love the Lord, we work actively.

How are you working as you actively wait for Christ's return?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Christ's followers recognize that God's kingdom is here in part (Luke 17:20-21).

Unlike the expectations of the Jews, the kingdom of God was not _____ in by grand triumphs but by the birth and _____ of Jesus.

? In what ways do you long for the kingdom of God?

KEY DOCTRINE #77: CHURCH AND KINGDOM

The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the _____ of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, anticipating the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's _____ is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the _____ through good works so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.

POINT 2: Christ's followers anticipate that God's kingdom is coming in full (Luke 17:22-35).

Jesus had to suffer and die so He could resurrect and ascend to heaven to one day _____ in a sudden and _____ manner.

? What are some unhelpful ways people have speculated about Christ's return?

Jesus _____ His disciples to be alert and ready for His return, anticipating _____ coming.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"At the end time of the world, he will not descend from heaven obscurely or secretly, but with godlike glory."²

—Cyril of Alexandria
(c. 375–444)



From Day 5: **How are you working as you actively wait for Christ's return?**

POINT 3: Christ's followers work for God's kingdom to be known by all
(Matthew 24:45-51).

Waiting for Jesus's return, we continue to live _____ lives in _____ to the King and kingdom.



What are the marks of a faithful and wise servant who follows Christ?

_____ will come to those who don't live with faithfulness and _____ of Christ's return.



Why is it easy for some to think Christ won't come back in their lifetime?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know God as our good and perfect King, we live joyfully and obediently under His reign, proclaiming Christ to the world so that others might enter into the kingdom.

- **HEAD:** How do we explain to others how evil still exists even as the kingdom is here?
- **HEART:** What are things we can praise God for regarding the good works He is doing through the kingdom today?
- **HANDS:** In what ways do you need to connect your words and actions together in a greater way to show Christ's rule in your life to point others to Christ?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"At his call the dead awaken,
Rise to life from earth and sea;
All the powers of nature shaken
By His look, prepares to flee.
Careless sinner, what will then become of thee?"³

—John Newton (1725–1807)