

Luke Chapter 17 - John Karmelich

1. My lesson title is the question, "How do we know for sure we are a Christian"? How can we tell for sure we are one of Jesus' disciples? If we plan on spending eternity in heaven, I'd say that is a pretty important question to consider. Believe it or not this chapter is one example after another about how to tell whether or not we are His disciples. It gives us examples of how Christians are supposed to act in this world. To explain, it's probably best if I summarize the stories here in this chapter and show how they tie to this theme. OK, here goes:
 - a) The first story is about forgiveness. It is a reminder of how often God forgive our sins and what our attitude should be to others who've hurt us. The key point is we need to learn to see people as God sees them and not as people who've hurt us. A reason Jesus calls on us to pray for those who have hurt us, is to help us see people as needing Him and not based on how they've actually treated us. My sole point here is simply that a good way to tell if we're saved is about our attitude toward other people who've hurt us. Do we see them as they've hurt us or see them as God sees them. To paraphrase the Golden Rule, treat other people as you want to be treated, not based on how they actually treat us. (Luke 6.31.)
 - b) The second story is also about how we're supposed to act as Christians. To put it simply our job is to do what is expected of us, not to be rewarded for doing as commanded. It'd be like told to go work an 8-hour day and then demanding extra pay for what we've been commanded to do in the first place. My point is a way to know we're saved is based on our attitude about salvation. We don't do it to earn points with God. We serve Him as it is what we're called to do. What if I don't know what to do? Welcome to the club. Just do what one enjoys doing while making a habit of praying and reading His word. I find that over time God leads us down paths that guide us for His glory.
 - c) The third story is about Jesus healing ten men who had leprosy. From there, only one of those men came back to Jesus to give Him thanks. The underlying point for you and me is a sign we're saved is we enjoy praising God for that salvation He's promised us and we enjoy having joy knowing that our eternal destiny is secured simply based on our trust in Jesus as both one who's in charge of our lives as well as the one who died for our sins.
 - d) The final story deals with Jesus Second Coming. He describes some of the things that do occur around the time of that event. The short version why this is here is that one way to tell we are a believers is that our hope isn't just in the fact that Jesus died for our sins, but also in the idea that we want Jesus to judge the world. One reason I can sleep at night is I believe in the idea that a fair God will judge the world fairly one day. Just as the purpose of Jesus' first coming was to bring joy to believers, the purpose of His Second Coming is to bring judgment on those who refuse to trust in Him. Therefore, one sign that we are true believers is that we trust in a fair God who will fairly judge the world one day for it's sins.
2. OK, that's enough to keep us on our toes for a lesson. I'm not saying we do have to spend every waking moment focused on Jesus. I am saying that a way to tell we're true believers is we have a heart for people and are willing to forgive them so that we can see them as God sees them. Then we're willing to be guided by what God desires for us as taught in His word. Then we remember to show gratitude to God for the salvation He's brought us. Finally we should look forward to a day when Jesus will judge the world for failing to trust Him to guide their lives. That's a pretty good summary of living the Christian life in a few sentences. The point is a way to tell if we are saved if we regularly make the effort to live this way. I'm not saying we have to be perfect, but to prove that we are saved, we're willing to live by these guidelines of forgiveness, trust, gratitude and looking forward to God judging the world. The rest as they say, is the details.
 - a) Speaking of details, it's time to go verse by verse through Chapter 17 as we learn more of how Jesus expects us to live as His disciples. With that said, let's get started.

3. Chapter 17, Verse 1: Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ² It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. ³ So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."
- a) In order to start, let's back up a little and remember we left off. Chapter 16 ended with a story about two dead men. One was sentenced to be hell and the other was saved. In that story, the one sentenced to hell asks if the saved man could return from the dead in order to warn the condemned soul's brothers of the bad things that await them. The answer he got was if his brothers wouldn't believe what's written in the bible as it existed back then, even a person returning from the dead won't convince them to change. That speech was for a group of religious Jewish men who didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah.
 - b) Now at the start of this chapter, Jesus is now talking to the disciples again. We don't know if it's still at the same scene as the last part of Chapter 16, or somewhere else. The reason Luke makes this connection is the last story teaches us who is eternally forgiven for their sins and who isn't. The issue wasn't being rich or poor, but who is who's trusting in God and what the entire bible teaches about repentance for their eternal salvation. All of that leads us to these verses. The point is God's willing to forgive us of all sins we do commit before and after we are saved and God expects us to have the same forgiving attitude to others when they sin against us.
 - i) At this point I always like to point out something from "The Lord's Prayer". Every line of that prayer except one, asks God to do something for us without us having to do anything in return. The exception is God asks us to forgive others just as He has forgiven us. One reason God asks us to forgive others for how they've hurt us, is it makes us realize just how much God has forgiven us. Another reason is so we don't hold onto the pain of how others have hurt us. A great line I've heard in my preparation for this lesson was what John MacArthur said: "We're never more God like when we forgive others of their sins as He's forgiven us of our sins".
 - c) All of that leads me back to the opening verse of this chapter. Jesus is saying sin is going to happen and the person who causes others to sin is in big eternal trouble. When I read of Verse 2, I always think of that verse as the "Mafia" verse. That's because the idea of a person being drowned by having a huge stone around him reminds me of the hit-man concept of drowning someone with "cement shoes" so they can't float to the surface. So is Jesus saying if we cause somebody to sin, we're doomed no matter what? No that misses the point. The idea is if we have such a hatred of God that we do things that cause others to turn from Him on a regular basis, it's an indication that we're not saved.
 - i) As an example, think about cults who deny Jesus as both God and the one who's paid the price for our sins. They will usually accept the fact that Jesus was a great miracle worker or maybe that He was a spirit only, but they'll usually deny a key aspect of the Gospel message. They may say He was a real human, but He didn't pay the complete price for all our sins. They may say Jesus died for our sins, but we still have to act morally in order to prove our worth to God. That denies we're saved by faith alone. My whole point is those that try to lead others away from the Gospel message are being fit for "cement water shoes" or some other type of eternally bad fate.
 - d) The idea is to remember that a loving God wants to be with people forever. We have the free will to choose to be with Him or not. The warning here is against the person or group that does anything that leads people away from Him. Ok, we get that. What does any of that have to do with the forgiveness issue? The answer is, if we encounter one who does not want anything to do with the Gospel message, here is why we should forgive them:

- i) Think about anger. Anger causes the opposition to be angry too. It's very hard to be kind or loving to a person or group that's angry at us. They would expect us to be angry at them based on their accusations against us. What's hard to handle is if we're being tough on someone and they turn around and be kind to us. We can't handle that type of loving attitude very easily. I'm not saying we don't have to say avoid a violent situation if at all possible. I am saying kindness and forgiveness is going to have a far greater impact on their lives than reacting in kind to how we're being treated by others.
 - ii) You may think I've jumped off the deep end in describing these verses, but that is exactly what Jesus is teaching here. The key issue in these verses is the question of how often do we forgive others who have hurt us. Consider how Jesus reacted to all of the false accusations by the Jewish religious leaders to His claim of deity. My point is we never read of Jesus getting into a fistfight with them. We don't read of Jesus killing a Pharisee there on the spot for opposing Him. If Jesus can and does forgive those who say bad things about Him, He wants us to have that same sort of loving attitude toward others who have hurt us.
 - iii) Well we may say, "We're not Jesus, we don't have that power". We'd be wrong on that issue. The power of the Holy Spirit working through us gives us the power to forgive others who have hurt us. The secret is not to see people as one's who have hurt us, but to see them as God sees them: As an example, I've been talking lately to a friend who's on the verge of a divorce. My advice for Him was to get in the daily habit of praying for his wife to see her as God sees her and not based on the way she's actually treated him. To state the obvious, I'm not talking about staying in physical abusive situations. I'm talking about forgiving so we don't continue to let others keep on hurting us based on what they've done to us in the past.
 - iv) That's why Jesus says in these verses, if someone hurts us seven times a day and asks for forgiveness, we need to forgive them every one of those times. The point is we can't say, "You messed up six times today already, no more forgiveness". I recall many years ago having to deal with someone who had a drug addiction. He begged for money and claimed he was clean. The point of forgiveness in that case would include not giving him any more money but at the same time trusting that he was trying to change his lives for the better. My point is we can forgive, but at the same time trust has to be earned, not just automatically given.
 - e) Coming back to compare the story from the last chapter to this one is in that last story we learn whom God forgives and whom He doesn't forgive. My point is the man who asks God for forgiveness seven or even a hundred times a day, gets that forgiveness from God. At the same time, trust has to be earned. Just as God is willing to forgive us the moment we realize He was right and we were wrong, so He does not want us to hold any grudge over others. Grant it, trust has to be earned, but at the same time we're not holding any anger in our hearts over others.
 - f) Let's be honest, to be able to forgive someone who has hurt us over and over again would be a very difficult thing to do. Our natural desire would be to want to hurt them back or at the least hold on to the pain as we think in our minds they too are suffering by us not forgiving them. The truth is we don't hurt them by holding on the pain, only ourselves. Still with the idea of having to forgive that often a difficult thing to do, I present Verse 5:
4. Verse 5: The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.
- a) First this verse is not saying that if we have a small amount of faith we can literally tell a bush or tree to be uprooted. Jesus used the example of a mountain in a similar passage. The point is even with a small amount of faith we can have the strength to forgive.

- b) Let me explain this idea another way. We don't have to trust God more in order to say to someone who's hurt us a lot to forgive him or her. We just have to trust that a God exists who rules over the world and He, not us is in charge of eternal judgment. The way others have hurt us is real and of course it hurts. However, holding onto that pain just causes us more pain, not the person who hurt us. Therefore, forgiving helps us to let go of that pain so we are free not only to worship God but to get on with our lives. That's why if we have just a little faith that God exists and that He's willing to forgive us of all our sins, then we should have the same sort of attitude of forgiveness that He has toward us.
 - c) Coming back to my lesson theme, the underlying point here is about how a true servant of God is supposed to act: One key attribute is having an attitude of forgiveness just as He forgives us of all our sins. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, just knowing that we have the power to let go of how others have hurt us may be the most God like thing we can do in our lives.
 - d) In the meantime, it's time for Jesus to teach us another aspect of how we are supposed to act as one of His followers:
5. Verse 7: "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸ Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "
- a) Jesus uses another illustration that almost anyone would understand. The simple point is we don't usual thank someone for doing what they're supposed to do in the first place. We simply ask they do their job because that's what they're supposed to do. The reason that obvious principal is here, is to remind us that God does not reward us for doing what He has called us to do. There are rewards in heaven, but I'm convinced they are based on our trusting Him to guide our lives and whether or not we acted based on that trust.
 - b) Jesus point is it's not normal for a master to thank his or her servant just for doing our job. At the same time to quote David Guzik, "Yet strangely, He will thank us and reward us. Though we don't deserve it, He will look at the work of each of His servants and to the faithful ones He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21, 23.)"
 - c) The underlying point is our attitude of service to God should never be, "I've done all that You've God asked me to do, now bless me here and now." Speaking of David Guzik, he also quoted an old Jewish expression that goes: "If you learned much in the Torah, claim not merit for yourself; for this purpose were you created' (m. Abot 2:8)." (Pate)
 - i) My point is the main purpose God gave us the bible is so that we can understand how He wants us to live our lives. Yes it's strange that God should reward us for obeying Him as stated in Matthew 25, but at the same time, it should not be the attitude of the Christian to expect rewards in this lifetime for doing what it is God has required us to do.
 - ii) Coming back to the previous story about forgiveness, we should forgive not so we can expect a great reward here and now, but because that is what God expect us to do when we have been hurt. We forgive to let go of the pain caused by how we've been hurt by others just as God used the cross to satisfy Himself for the pain we've caused Him by not doing what it is He designed us to do. The point is we use the little faith we have in God to realize just as He's forgiven us of all our sins so we as His servants should forgive others who've hurt us so we can let go of that pain.
 - d) Coming back to the verses, the message is clearly, "Do what you've been called to do" and then we can enjoy our rewards for our service. As Christians, it's not like we have to say, be a good servant of Jesus 8 hours a day and the rest of the time we can sin all we want. It is that we're always on duty for our king. Our rewards for that service are in the next life.

- i) However, as most of us know, for example, when we do forgive, we can feel that burden being lifted from inside of us. When we do what Jesus asks us to do, we do enjoy life far more than we turn from Him. When we put the needs of others as a priority over our own needs, we feel good about ourselves at the end of the day. The point is we do all of that not so God can pat us on the back, but because that is what He's called us to do as believers. Yes there are rewards in heaven for doing what it is He's called us to do, but in effect how He rewards us is His business and not ours. Our job is to be that good servant and do what we're called to do.
 - ii) Let me back up for a moment and ask, what if I have no idea what I'm supposed to do next? Again, my answer is welcome to the club. That's why Jesus teaches us to go through our lives, ask for His guidance, read our bibles regularly and as we go through our lives, be aware of opportunities where we can make a difference for Him in our lives. The point is a good servant doesn't just do what he or she is told, but looks for opportunities in order to be a good servant. It's a good thing to pray for: Dear God, as one of your servants, give me an opportunity today to be a good servant for You and make a difference for You in the world around me. It doesn't mean to expect a reward on the spot for doing something like that. We do look for such opportunities only because that's our job as His servants.
 - iii) Now that I've beaten that point to death, we can move on to the next few verses.
6. Verse 11: Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"
- a) In case you care, Jesus is still crisscrossing His way through Israel with the inevitable goal of reaching Jerusalem for what will be the key moment of all of human history. Here we read of one of those points of travel where Jesus is walking along the border between the area controlled by the Jewish people who lived around the Lake Galilee area and a section of land controlled by the Samaritans. As a quick reminder, the Samaritans were a nation whose heritage was a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish people. Their history goes back many centuries to when the Jewish nation was split into two kingdoms, one of which had their capital in Samaria in Northern Israel. That nation turned from God and developed their own religion with a mixture of Judaism and pagan religions.
 - i) My point is it was normal for Jewish people to walk around that nation as Jewish people had no dealing with Samaritans as they were thought of as "half breeds" who have hopelessly turned from God with no chance of repentance.
 - b) Now that I've painted an ugly picture of the ancient group of Samaritans, let me now give an even uglier picture of what is a leper. The short version is that it's a horrible disease that attacks our nerves. People lose their limbs as they no longer feel them. What has to be understood here is the ten men who had leprosy here were probably a mixture of those who were Samaritans and those who were Jews. The point is lepers were outcasts of both of those societies. So as a means of survival, those who had it ignored their differences in order to survive together. I admit that I wonder if the 10 lepers from this story had heard about Jesus curing other lepers as described earlier in Luke and in other gospels. In other words if "word was out" Jesus cured lepers, maybe that's why this group sought out Jesus here in order to be helped by Him.
 - c) Understand that lepers were not to have any contact whatsoever with any other members of society. To get that disease means to never speak to or any physical contact with other members of one's family as one is now an outcast from society. That's why we read of the lepers from both religions hanging out together in order to survive. OK John I admit, this is a sad story. So why should I care about it? The issue isn't about the disease, it's about our attitude we're supposed to have as believers as we'll read in the next set of verses to finish this story. Speaking of which:

7. Verse 14: When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."
- a) In Leviticus Chapter 14 in the Old Testament, there are a whole set of rituals stated for how to recognize leprosy and tell the difference between the real thing versus having a false alarm. There were also rituals to verify whether or not the leprosy has gone away and that person can be part of society again. The point being is that it was such a horrible disease, one had to make sure one really had it before they were banned from society.
 - b) Notice Jesus doesn't just cure the people and say, now go enjoy your lives again! Instead He does say what's required under Jewish law before you enter society again. I suspect a reason Jesus did this was to show the religious leaders in Jerusalem of Jesus power over disease and His willingness to cure what is not stated how to cure in the Old Testament. It may help to get the idea that the Old Testament spends two chapters on the subject of leprosy, but never talks about how to cure it, only how to recognize it and how to declare a person as being clean of that disease.
 - i) So if this disease is so horrible, why did God allow it exist in the first place? Part of it, is this disease symbolically is associated with sin. The idea behind those two chapters in Leviticus is about learning to separate sin from our lives and protect our society from sin. Even with that understood, why did God allow such a tough disease to exist in the first place? (Or AIDS or cancer while I'm asking Him?) The standard answer is this world is cursed by sin and we have to accept that reality.
 - ii) Although I've never encountered anyone with leprosy, I've dealt with many who have had to deal with cancer. If anything I believe the process draws us closer to God as one realizes the end is near and one depends more upon Him as one can use one's remaining time to fight the disease and make a difference for Him. My point is I don't know why God would allow such horrible diseases to exist, but I do know it can help people draw closer to Him as they realize their time is limited.
 - iii) This leads me back to my chapter theme about understanding what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It doesn't mean we'll all get some other horrible disease that'll kill us in a matter of months. It does mean that this disease is a reminder to us that our time on earth is limited and the most valuable thing we can do with our time is use it to make a difference for God in our lives. That too, is why this story about Jesus curing the leper's is here. Not just to show Jesus power over this disease, but to show us that since Jesus has taken away our sins, it shows what be our attitude should be toward God as His grateful disciples for what He's done for us.
 - iv) On that happy note, let's return a little to these verses.
 - c) In Verse 15, one of the ten lepers that Jesus cleaned came back to praise God using a loud voice out of gratitude for being cured. That one cured man who was grateful happened to be Samaritan. At that time in history, some Jewish people destroyed the Samaritan main temple, and maybe that man realized he can't go to the Jewish temple, so all he could do to show his gratitude was praise Jesus. However, before Jesus complimented this man for showing gratitude, Jesus first question was what happened to the other nine? It's logical to assume the other nine were Jewish and they were off to Jerusalem to go do the Jewish rituals of proving their leprosy was gone. Jesus wasn't condemning them for doing what is required in the law. He was condemning them for not showing gratitude to God there on the spot for what Jesus did and acknowledging Him as the source of our cure for all of our diseases let alone something as horrible as leprosy. The point for you and me is about using our lives to show gratitude to God for removing our sins so we can serve Him.

- d) After Jesus complains about the other nine who didn't express their gratitude to Jesus for being cured, Jesus turns His attention back on the one person who did show gratitude. I suppose the other nine were grateful for being cured, but they just went on their merry way thinking, "Jesus used His power to help me, now I can just go enjoy my life again without showing any gratitude of appreciation to Him". A sign that one isn't a disciple of Jesus is when we fail to show gratitude to God for paying the complete price of our sins. In effect, I've just described all nonbelievers. People can live sin-free just by accepting that idea, but won't because most want to prove to God they deserve to be in heaven based on how they act in life as opposed to simply trusting in what Jesus has already done and by showing gratitude for that fact.
- e) Meanwhile, back to the one Samaritan who did show gratitude. The one thing that Jesus did say to him was "'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'" Notice Jesus doesn't tell him to go to the Jewish temple and perform the rituals as required in Leviticus. What Jesus is telling this foreigner that trusting what God has done for our lives is sufficient for our salvation. Does that mean all we have to do is trust Jesus and then we can ignore all of the laws as stated in the bible? Let's put it this way: Do you think God approves of say, stealing or murder just because we're saved? Of course not. The law teaches us how to live the type of life that's pleasing to God. We can't obey it to prove our worth to Him. We can only obey it out of gratitude for what He's already done for us. It's only by His power that we can even obey it in the first place.
- i) So does that mean in order to show my gratitude to God, I have to eat kosher and go to synagogue on Saturday? Of course not. As to when we go to church, Paul taught us for some Christians "every day is a day of worship and some people worship God more on one day than another" (My paraphrase of Romans 14:5.)
- ii) As to the food laws in Leviticus Chapter 11, this was specifically for the Jewish people as ways of reminders of them to keep their focus on God. For details on why those food laws are there, read my lesson on that chapter.
- iii) Okay, enough Leviticus quotes for one lesson, back to Luke. The point here for us is that a sign we are one of Jesus' disciples is whether or not we express gratitude for our salvation. Yes singing in church is one sign. Another is our attitude in life about the reality of our salvation. The point is we don't go around trying to prove ourselves to God that we deserve to be with Him forever. We should be grateful and regularly show it because we're already saved. The Samaritan in this story realized he had a fresh start in life and took the time to express his thanks to God for that new life. That in effect is what Jesus is asking us to do here and now.
8. Verse 20: Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."
- a) The scene now switches from Jesus talking to a foreigner about worshipping God, to that of a religious Jewish person asking when the "kingdom of God" will come. To understand what this question is about, I should give a little background on Messianic expectations:
- i) Devoutly religious people like the Pharisee's believed they were saved by keeping God's laws as much as possible. Even with that stated, they did believe that God promised a man would come one day to rule over the world from Israel. I doubt that the man asking Jesus the question thought that He was the Messiah. I suspect this Pharisee was just asking Jesus His opinion of when does this age begin.
- ii) Even as Christians, we accept the idea of Jesus returning one day to begin an age of His rule over the world. The Gospels make it very clear that we are not allowed to know when that date is. (See Matthew 24:36 or Mark 13:32.) God won't share the date with us as it keeps us on our toes that life as we know it can always end at anytime. Just like the idea we could always die tomorrow.

- iii) My point here is that as an incentive to live a life to please God, we should keep in mind not only that we could die at any time, but that Jesus could also return at any time. Even after 2,000 years I'm still convinced it is true and the fact that Israel is now an independent country after not existing, let alone being independent for thousands of years gives me more hope it will happen someone in the future.
- iv) All of that leads me back to the Pharisee's question about the Messianic age. Like most Christians he'd love to know when that is going to start. With that thought in mind, let's now discuss why Jesus answered as He did, and how that affects my lesson theme of how we know for sure we are saved.
- b) Jesus response to the question of the "Messianic Age" is that it doesn't come with careful observation. It comes within us. Christians don't have physical marks on their bodies to show we are saved. Nor do we look differently. Jesus point is only God the Father knows who are His, as by definition He is all knowing. We can only know we're saved if we are trusting that Jesus is in charge of our lives and that God raised Him from the dead. The idea is that "Messianic Age" has begun "in one sense" based on those who trust in Jesus.
 - i) So if that's true, what about the literal return of Jesus? Why can't the world just go on forever with some being saved and some not being saved? Why does it have to end with a literal period of Jesus ruling over this world? To begin, if I can trust in the hundreds of literal predictions about Jesus First Coming being literally fulfilled then I can trust in the hundreds of literal predictions about Jesus Second Coming being literal as well. There is biblical and nonbiblical evidence that Jesus really did exist 2,000 years ago. The fact that the disciples were tortured to death and were told they could end that torture if they just denied Jesus didn't rise from the dead is one of my favorite bits of historical proof that Jesus is who He claimed to be.
 - ii) Luke who wrote this Gospel also wrote Acts as a "Second Volume". In the opening chapter, Luke describes that Jesus was taken up into heaven will return one day as He was taken up. My point is there is a literal return of Jesus one day to earth.
 - iii) There are those who argue that every time someone is saved, that is "Jesus' return" to accept that person. There are cults that say Jesus did return secretly at one time but the rest of the world didn't know it. The problem with that view is it "flies in the face" of what the bible teaches: Revelation 1:7 says "'Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen." (NIV). Back in Acts Chapter 1, it stated that Jesus was taken up into the clouds and John states in Revelation 1:7 that Jesus will return literally in a the same way He was taken up to heaven as described in the book of Acts.
 - iv) OK John, it's been about 2,000 years. How can any of us take that promise literally after such a long time period? First there is the evidence that Israel exists again as a country. Why do you think the "world" is so hell-bent on it's destruction? Then we have Peter's statement that for a God day is like a thousand years. (2 Peter 3:8.) Peter's point is time is effectively meaningless to an eternal God. My point is the bible has hundreds of predictions in the Old and New Testament about a literal return of the Messiah and as much as I'm convinced Jesus was raised from the dead and He is God, I'm equally as convinced that He'll literally return one day.
- c) All of that leads me back to the issue of the Messiah's literal return. The guy asking this question may or may not have wondered about Jesus as the Messiah. What this man was wondering about is will there be a literal time period of that age beginning? Jesus dodged the question to say that the kingdom of God is within those who trust in Him. Again that dodges his question. The reason Jesus didn't answer it is not to deny it will happen. It is to say effectively it's God's business when that era begins. Our job is to be a good witness for Jesus now until that day does come one day. However, Jesus isn't done on this topic:

9. Verse 22: Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. ²³ Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. ²⁴ For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.
- a) Here, Jesus is answering the question of when He will set up His eternal kingdom. What we get out of these verses is the idea that while we don't know when that day will occur, we can recognize it when it happens. These verses start with the fact Jesus is speaking to His disciples, not the non-believer who asked about when the Messianic era to begin. The reason that's important is we have to get the idea that we must (big emphasis on must) be born again in order to appreciate Jesus' return. To say that another way, if we're not born again, the return of Jesus means eternal damnation.
 - b) To explain further, picture a bumper sticker that says, "Jesus is coming back, but this time He's really angry". In effect, that summarizes a lot of truth about Jesus. It's realizing that the first time Jesus came, was to bring us the joy of our salvation. Those of us who have accepted Jesus eternal payment for our sins and do trust that He's in charge of our lives now have eternal joy if we choose to live with that realization despite whatever we have to deal with at anytime. The Second Coming of Jesus is not a joyful event for those who don't believe in Him, but a time of eternal judgment.
 - c) OK, then tell me again, why does Jesus have to literally return to earth? For starters, it is a reminder to the world that He's in charge of it and not us nor the natural course of events. What I mean by that is our planet will not end by the sun burning out, our by a horrible catastrophe. If we accept the idea that a God greater than us created the world, then we also need to accept the idea that He's in charge of the world and He can and will bring it to an end on His timing as well. To explain it another way, the only reason I can sleep at night is if I accept the idea of a God whom will one day judge the world fairly for its sins. To worry is about seeing life without a God who's in control of the whole thing.
 - i) If that last paragraph doesn't work for you, then believe in Jesus' literal return as the bible says so. There are more predictions about life around and after the time of Jesus literal return then there are predictions about life after Jesus first coming. If I can trust all of the predictions in the Old Testament that tie to what Jesus did the first time He came, then I should also trust all of the predictions made about what He'll do the second time.
 - d) All of that leads me back to Jesus' speech here to His disciples. He starts by saying they'll long to see life again when Jesus was with them. He is saying not to believe people when they say things like, "Jesus secretly returned years ago and did this or that." Jesus is also saying to us, don't believe it when books come out saying Jesus will return exactly upon this future date or this future year in history.
 - i) Then Jesus uses an illustration that most of us can relate to. There are few things in nature as powerful to watch as lightening. The moment it strikes, it is blinding for the brief moment to see it. Still, in a desert climate like Israel, when it strikes, one cannot miss it. That's why Jesus uses that image to say how it is He'll return.
 - ii) To explain it using modern technology, given the fact that most of the world now has smart phones or access to video on demand, I'm convinced the whole world will see the event as brightly as lightening flashing across the sky.
 - iii) OK John, but the text says the disciples will see this event. All those disciples did live and die roughly 2,000 years ago and never saw His return. As you love to say to us, they were all tortured and killed for their belief in Jesus. When did they get to see this event? As many bible teaches like to say, they like most of us will see it from the "balcony" of heaven. Go back to the text and notice it never says they'll see the event themselves. It just implies that Jesus will return after He suffers.

- iv) The reason the bible goes to a lot of trouble to state in all the Gospels as well as in passages throughout the New Testament that Jesus will return is to keep us on our toes. It's like the idea of people working harder knowing the boss will be looking over our shoulders at any moment. If we wake each day with the realization that Jesus can return at any time, it is a motivation tool to keep us focused on Him. As I was correctly taught, the desire for Jesus to return today is not so that we can, say get out of paying our bills that are due. We desire His return as we desire for Him to be in charge of the world as He is already (key word) in charge of our lives.
 - a) That's why I argue that we have to be born again just to appreciate the fact He's going to return one day to rule over the world. Yes Jesus is returning for judgment, not only of those alive at that time, but for those who've died already but refused to trust in Him. If you wonder what's Jesus going to do when He returns, just keep in mind it's a time of judgment. As the bumper sticker says, "Jesus is coming back, but this time He's really angry".
 - v) The final part of those verses shows us that Jesus was always aware of the fact He had to die for the sins of the world in His first coming. It is stated almost blatantly in Verse 25. The reason that verse is there is to remind us that He can't come back until His mission of the First Coming is completed as He planned it to be. In the meantime, Jesus is still lecturing us what life will be like when He returns.
10. Verse 26: "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.
- a) To understand these verses, remember that the disciples were not bible experts, but most Jewish people did have a basic understanding of the bible stories. In other words, when they were not fishing, they still went to church, ok synagogue every week. My point is if Jesus refers to event like Noah and the flood, the audience knows what He's referring to.
 - i) By the way, notice Jesus is validating the life of Noah as historical fact and not a made up story here in these verses. As I like to say every so often, if you don't believe Jesus is God, you have much bigger problems, than say, believing whether or not Genesis is factual in it's account of history.
 - b) What Jesus is saying here in these verses is that when Noah was busy building his boat in his driveway, life went on as normal. As I heard one pastor joke, "Can you please move that boat out of my way, I'm on my way out to meet people for a big meal!" Jesus' point is simply that life will be going on as normal and then the event happens. Now consider if Jesus had returned say, 10 or 30 years ago. We might not have been saved. The point is to be grateful Jesus has delayed as long as He has or we'd never appreciate life from His perspective of living it in order to make a difference for Him in this world. Even with the fact we each have loved one's who are not saved, as a Christian, it's still better to live with the expectation that Jesus will return one day to judge the world. Nobody knows when it will occur, we just know it will happen. Just like the flood came when no one expected it back in Noah's day so Jesus' return will happen as judgment is necessary on this world as well as the bible predicting the necessity of Jesus' return to judge the world. Next we'll have one more example of judgment coming out of "nowhere" as told in Genesis:
11. Verse 28: "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.
- a) The short version here is that Abraham in Genesis had a nephew named Lot. God told Abraham that He will destroy the city of Sodom because it was wicked beyond help. It is the idea that sometimes the most merciful thing we can do is put something to death as we can't save it. Kind of like shooting a wounded horse. The point here is that the city of Sodom had gotten that bad, so God destroyed that city right after Lot left it.

- b) The underlying point is that the world we live in is cursed by sin. Like Sodom, it's grown to a point where it's effected the entire world and the most merciful thing God can do is to destroy it like He destroyed Noah's world and the place where Lot lived. I could give us a lecture here about "Sodomy" and that town, but let's just say it's an example of a world that has grown so corrupt, it is beyond help. We're not reading of a God who is cruelly destroying what He doesn't approve of, but a God who's teaching there is an eternal price to pay for turning from Him. It's like God saying "Let me speed up the process" as it's the most merciful thing I can do. If God created this world, then He gets to decide what to do with it. Just as He decided when it began, so He also decides when it's going to end. It's also His decision to decide who gets to be with Him in Heaven forever. The great mercy He shows us is by trusting in His promise of salvation, we get the privilege of being with Him forever.
- i) Coming back to my lesson theme, we can know we are saved by trusting in His promise of eternal life and trust in the fact Jesus will return to judge the world for turning from Him. What these last few verses teach us is simply that while none of us know the exact day or hour, we have to realize that life will go on as normal right before it happens. I'm also convinced that no one will be lost who God does not intend to save in the first place. God gives believers the privilege of leading people to Him, but at the same time if God is perfect by definition, He knows who will and will not be saved for all of eternity and I'm convinced that no one will be lost who God does not intend to save in the first place.
- c) Coming back to the story of Sodom, it might help to remember a few details about it from Genesis Chapter 19. The story of Lot is not one of greatness. He was a man that trusted in God to guide His life, but never used it to make a difference for Him. Still Lot was "one of God's" so therefore, the angels sent to destroy that town, couldn't start until He actually was out of there. It's another little proof to me that no one will be eternally lost who does not trust in God to guide his or her life. In that story Lot's wife died as she was fleeing, as she longed (desired to live there) some more. The reason that aspect of the story is there is to remind us to not "long" for this world as opposed to longing for God to come rule is in effect the same as eternal damnation. It's one thing to feel sorry for the lost. It's another to want to live as long as possible in a world without God ruling over it. That's why the idea of spiritual maturity is desiring God to rule over our lives and over the world as our world is corrupt beyond help. The only reason God's waited as long as He has, is there's still people out there who need to be saved. As the classic joke goes, "If you're the last one to decide whether or not to believe in Jesus, hurry up and do so we can get on with it!"
- d) Speaking of Lot's wife, it's time for Verse 30:
12. Verse 30: "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. ³² Remember Lot's wife! ³³ Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. "
- a) There are people who wrongly argue that Jesus effectively returned in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem. That's because when the Roman Army did come those who survived had to run as fast as possible and should not hesitate or desire to save some souvenirs before running for one's life. By the way, I'm convinced Luke wrote this book before 70 AD, or else he would have referenced the literal destruction of that city.
- b) While the destruction of that city was God's judgment for them refusing to turn to Jesus, I'm also equally as convinced there has to be a judgment on the entire world one day. In effect, that judgment on Jerusalem was a preview of what will happen when Jesus literally returns one day as promised throughout the bible.

- c) Let me explain this another way: Suppose Jesus never literally returns to earth and it just goes on forever until one day the sun burns out or say human life is destroyed by bombs. If there is no judgment day, then we might as well kill and steal all we want as there is no reason to respect human life to begin with. However, if we do live with a healthy fear of God judging both the world corporately and us individually, that should motivate us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Coming back to how we can tell if we're saved a good sign is if we desire to see His kingdom and His judgment as there's no other way to save our world as again, "It's beyond repair".
 - d) That little speech leads me back to Lot's wife. Genesis 19 teaches that she longed for the world of Sodom as it was being destroyed. What God is teaching us is not to long for our own world that we all eventually have to leave behind when we die one day. That's why we should desire His Kingdom and His judgment upon this world as it will happen one day and that's the only way the world can be made "right and fair" one day. Most of us learn at an early age that life isn't fair no matter how hard we try. Our only hope of living in a "fair" world is for God Himself to come back, rule over this world and judge it.
 - e) All of that leads me to Verse 33. That verse says that anyone who desires to lose their life for God's sake will find eternal life. The Christian life is all about learning to live to please Him and not our own desires. Once we learn to truly let go of what we want for ourselves is usually when God blesses us so we can continue to make a difference for Him. If we do desire to live for this world, that's when we're doomed for destruction. That is what Lot's wife desires and unfortunately that's what most people desire.
 - f) Then we get the famous pair of Verses, 34 and 35. It says that two people will be in bed where one will be taken and one left. It also says two will be making bread where one of them will be taken and the other left. In the parallel passage of Matthew 24:40, it says that two men will be working in a field where one is taken and the other is left. Some English translations mention that line here in Luke but it is debated whether or not a scribe later added that line. However there is no debate about whether it's part of Matthew's account.
 - g) The point is somewhere in the world it's always nighttime and Jesus will come back when some are asleep. Somewhere else in the world it is daytime and He'll return when some are at work. The wrong idea is to think of this passage as describing the rapture of the church. Remember that Jesus is talking about judgment. My point is when He does return to rule from Jerusalem, some people will get to live to live through that time, while others suffer judgment for refusing to trust in God for guidance over their lives. Those who are taken away at that time, are taken to eternal judgment, while others get to live on. My point is when Jesus returns, it's not just believers returning to enjoy that event, there will also be people continuing to populate the world to live under Jesus' rule. To state it another way, if Jesus is going to literally rule over the world, He needs somebody to rule over. Those who are alive at that time after the "great tribulation" event, who do trust in Jesus then, do get to see the world "first hand" with Jesus ruling over it. Those of us who aren't alive to witness that event do return with Jesus to rule with Him.
 - h) Bottom line is this will occur one day because the bible says it will happen and the bible's track record for accuracy is 100% so far, so I trust in the future events as well to occur.
13. Verse 37: "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."
- a) While I'm obsessed with the "why" question, the disciples asked the "where" question. We don't get a specific place as it will be a worldwide event. Before I say anything else, some bible translations say "eagle" and not vulture. The word can refer to either type of bird, but only vultures eat dead carcasses, so that's a better translation. Jesus point is that if you want to see "where" look for vultures as they lead you to dead carcasses. Since we accept the idea of God ruling over the entire world, Jesus in His own way, is saying that it will be a worldwide event, period.

14. OK John, enough end time theology. Why should we care about any of this stuff? The point of the entire lesson is about how to know for sure one is saved. One way we can tell is that if we do desire God's world more than we desire to live in our world. If we desire God to rule over us not only in the next life but also in this life, that's a big clue we're saved. But we can't be thinking of God every moment of the day. Nobody said we have to. The issue is do we have a heart for God to a point where we care more about pleasing Him than we do our own desires. If we think that way, we can be assured of our salvation, which is the point of this lesson. With that said, let me wrap this up in my ending prayer.
15. Heavenly Father, First as we know you've forgiven us of all our sins, help us have the same type of attitude with others who've hurt us. Help us to see people as You do, as needing to be close to you in a relationship as You desire we do as well. Next, help us to realize that obedience to You is what we've been called to do, not to earn favor or merit with You. Then given the fact we are saved by faith alone, help us to never cease to show gratitude for that salvation. Finally help us to never lose site of Your return, not to get out of our problems, but just because we want You to rule over the world as You already rule over those who trust in You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.