

**Home Church Study Guide—May 30, 2010**  
**The Day is Coming (Luke 17)**

Chapter 17:1-10 brings to an end the section of Luke dealing with the question, “Who will participate in the end time kingdom of God?” Jesus begins by warning His disciples that life in the kingdom will not be easy. Occasions for stumbling will be many. What does He mean by stumbling? In the context, it must be understood as opportunities to live outside the kingdom of God rather than in it. Evil surrounds us, so we must remain focused on God’s purpose for our lives. Woe to us if we cause one of these “little ones” to stumble. Who are those “little ones?” In the context it must be understood as the crippled, the hungry, the poor, the diseased, the weak, those it is so easy to ignore. “Causing them to stumble” would be our ignoring their needs- a strong rebuke to the Pharisees who had no concern for those who were socially marginalized. On the other hand, the disciple of Jesus must be ready to confront sinful behavior, and upon the repentance of the sinner, forgive without limit. No keeping score, no partial forgiveness- life in the merciful community of God. This was clearly difficult for Jesus’ disciples, for they immediately cried for more faith. Jesus’ response must be understood. The apostles did not need “more faith.” They needed faith, true faith. For true faith is so powerful that in its most meager expression, it could blow a deep rooted mulberry tree into the sea!

The following story expresses Jesus’ dismay at the apparent difficulty that the disciples had with unlimited forgiveness. If one were able to so forgive, he or she should not expect favored status. It was not big thing. This was simply expected behavior in the kingdom of God. If verses 7-10 were taken seriously, it would radically change the church, I believe. That for which we demand special honor is often the minimal expected kingdom behavior. Woe to the church that does not adequately recognize those who serve it! Do we expect God to honor us for being faithful servants? At the end of the day, if we have exhausted ourselves in faithful service to our glorious God, we ought to be willing to say, “we are worthless servants. We have done only what we ought to do. We are apprentices of Jesus and we have much yet to learn. But look at how far we’ve come. The road ahead is difficult- the walk in the kingdom of God is not an easy one. It is a narrow way. But with God’s help, we will continue to be more like our Master everyday. May those who have ears to hear, hear the good news of the kingdom.

The story of the ten lepers is another of the Bible stories we know quite well if we were fortunate enough to attend Bible school as children. I can still remember the first time I heard this story. I remember the picture of the one cleansed leper at Jesus’ feet while the others walked joyfully away. It broke my heart that only one said “thanks.” The story still impacts me. I have been told by some that I say “thank you” too often. But I would rather annoy you with too many “thank you’s” than be guilty of taking a gift or blessing for granted. Can you imagine? A leper was a complete outcast, slowly dying of a degenerative disease with no hope of a cure. They stayed in colonies, and if they wandered out, they had to shout “unclean, unclean” if anyone approached. In their deep misery, they cried out to Jesus, acknowledging Him as Master, begging for His mercy. His response was immediate. He asked them to seek reclassification of their status by the priests, as required by the law. Luke tells us that as they went, they were healed. Can you imagine what they must have felt? The new birth they experienced is beyond comprehension! Think about how they must have felt as they watched the transformation to their bodies that occurred. Amazingly, only one was immediately moved to thank the healer. And he was a Samaritan. Why was this important? Especially in view of the coming verses, only one of the ten chose to experience kingdom life. Only one acknowledged the wonderful work of God, thus demonstrating his faith in God. Ten received healing, only one received the blessing. We must not miss the deep meaning of this passage.

Many receive blessings daily from God, but few stop to thank him and acknowledge their faith in Him. I am not talking about non-believers. I am thinking of those who call themselves Christians but choose to live as if all they have is of their own doing. They may call out in times of despair, and God with His gracious mercy responds. But the help is immediately forgotten as they celebrate their good fortune and continue on their way. The kingdom of God is available to them, but they choose not to fall at the feet of the gentle healer and acknowledge their thanksgiving and their constant need for their Lord. And they quietly wonder where the kingdom of God might be.

This leads us into the next story in our reading. All those around Jesus saw what He was doing. None were untouched by it. However, many were blind to it. They saw healings, but missed the message. So, the clueless Pharisees asked, “When is the kingdom of God coming?” Jesus had already responded directly to this in Luke 11:20. If He were working by the power of God (which no one could openly deny), then the kingdom of God had indeed come! But the Pharisees preconceived ideas concerning the kingdom of God did not allow them to see it! They thought it was all about them. So the crippled could be cured, the blind given sight, the lepers cleansed, the dead raised- and it meant nothing to them! Now, clearly there is a second issue here. While the kingdom of God was among them in the work of Jesus, there was yet to be a

day, a final day when the kingdom would be realized in its fullness. So Jesus here is dealing with two issues. The first is the Pharisees inability to recognize who Jesus was; the second was that final day of judgment yet to come.

Jesus' discussion of his second coming contains images that are unpleasant. Some will not be saved. And there will be no second chance. His teaching concerning his final coming, calls us to live in the kingdom of God in the present, then we will have no need to fear. It will be much like it was in the days of Noah, when most continued living normal lives right up until the flood destroyed them. It will be like those in the days of Lot, who were focused on the things of this world, right up until Sodom was destroyed. There were years of opportunities for repentance in both cases, but life went on as if it would continue forever. Jesus wants us to know that the end is coming, and there will be no opportunity to go back and redo that which is done. The idea of not going back to the house refers to the uselessness of possessions at that time. It will be a time of dividing. Those who have given up their life to the kingdom will secure it; those who have tried to secure life in this world will lose it. What will happen to us on that day? Will we immediately try to gather into our arms that which we have accumulated, or will we celebrate that our riches have been entrusted to Him who is to come?

Jesus' disciples, clearly concerned, don't know really what to ask. They have to know something concrete, and so they ask "Where, Lord?" They are wanting to know where the favored or saved will be taken. There are many different ideas about Jesus' answer. It is not an easy one to understand. "Where the corpse is, there the vultures gather" is a proverb of Jesus' day. Likely, He is referring to the destruction that is to come. But the proverb itself does not have to be understood as negative. Some would suggest that Jesus is telling the disciples they need not worry. When the time comes, they will gather to Him as naturally as vultures to a dead body. Whatever the meaning, Jesus is telling us all that if we are living faithfully in our relationship with God, we need not worry about the day of the Son of Man. Jesus is not finished with this discourse. We will visit it again in chapter 21.

**"So What" for Home Church discussion:**

1. There is no entitlement in God's kingdom (17:7-10). Everything is a gift. We should expect nothing from what we do for God other than his acknowledgement that we have done what he has asked. Our sense of entitlement in our culture has infiltrated our view of the church, unfortunately.
2. While ten lepers were healed, only one received the true blessing Jesus had to give. The healing was a gift, but the blessing was the greatest gift. Gratitude to God for his gifts is ultimately for the one who is grateful- it is in that we receive the blessing.
3. This life will not go on forever. We need to live in a state of prepared faithfulness.