

Gradually and Suddenly

Luke 17:20-37

What are some things that happen so gradually we might miss it?

What are some things that happen so suddenly we can't react?

Sometimes God's work is gradual

Might we be missing it?

Sometimes God's work is sudden!

Are we ready for it?

A Brief History of Time

Creation: a very good world

Fall: Kingdom of this world (separate from God, so it is dying)

Redemption: Kingdom of God (a perfect and more glorious world)

Promise & preparation: The Old Testament

Gradually: Mustard seed, yeast in dough

Jesus: obscure, ordinary, suffering & death

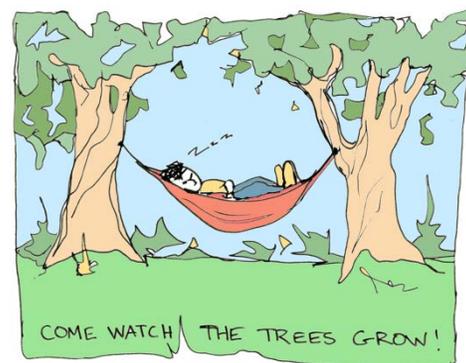
Church (Jesus' body): small, ordinary, with trouble

Suddenly: Radical displacement by Jesus' Kingdom

The Son of Man's return (Jesus)

Life with God in unhindered beauty and flourishing

Or judgment



Luke 17:20-37

20-21: God's Kingdom is already present and growing

Yet easily overlooked

Jesus was overlooked...

born as an ordinary infant, who grew up as an ordinary boy, in an ordinary family, in an ordinary town,

died a horrible death, without public victory

We can overlook the Kingdom of God...

amid the joys and challenges of life

a temptation for those who have much to enjoy in life is not to even look for it

22-25: The Son of Man will come suddenly and boldly

It won't be possible to miss it when it happens!

Before then, there will be trouble

The Son of Man must suffer

For disciples too—at different times in different ways... (you'll long for His return but won't see it)

Don't be deceived

You won't need to go someplace or to some special people or teacher to find it

A temptation especially for those who have much trouble in life



26-29: Final Judgment will come suddenly

The Days of Noah

The people were very evil ("every inclination of their thoughts")

"So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created...'" Genesis 6:5-8

God called Noah to be rescued

"So God said to Noah, 'Make yourself an ark ...' Noah did everything just as God commanded him." Genesis 6:13-22

Noah told the people to turn to God (for 50-75 years)

God "protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness" 2 Peter 2:5

The day came when the door was shut and they were judged

“Then the Lord shut him in the ark.... Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind.” Genesis 7:13-21

The Days of Lot

The people were very evil

Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous...” Genesis 18:20-21

God called Lot to be rescued

“Get them out of here...we are going to destroy this place” Genesis 19:12-13

Lot told the people to be rescued

“Lot said, ‘Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!’ But they thought he was joking.” Genesis 19:14

Destruction came suddenly, including Lot’s wife

“Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah.... But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” Genesis 19:24-25

Jesus didn’t talk (here) about people’s evil

He warned about their focus on the normal and good things of life instead of hearing God’s warning about the radical change that would come suddenly

30-37: The choice we all make: which kingdom is our focus?

Looking back (kingdom of this world) or looking forward (Kingdom of God)

We either have a life that is...

focused on the existing world or focused on the coming Kingdom of God

“If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.” Hebrews 11:15

Only the Kingdom of God will continue and thrive

Because there will be no ruler except God

What we have chosen will be final in that day

The Big Idea

Christ’s Kingdom is already here

growing gradually

hidden in ordinariness and trouble

and will come suddenly, completely, and irresistibly

with judgment or blessing forever

Gradually

When things grow gradually...we can easily stop paying attention

Especially when we have pleasure, peace, power, and other advantages, ...

“The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” Romans 13:11

Suddenly

When things happen suddenly...there is no time to react!

We are at risk of being caught unprepared

“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.”

1 Thessalonians 5:4

Jesus warned:

We can so easily miss the gradual growth and we are at risk of missing His sudden arrival

Application

Treasure the Kingdom of God every day

even while we live well in the kingdom of the world

Don’t “set your heart” on things in this world

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.... And **do not set your heart on [them]; do not worry about it.** For the pagan world runs after all

such things, and **your Father knows that you need them**. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." Luke 12:22-31

It doesn't mean:

Live foolishly, don't plan, ignore the joys and concerns of this world, ...

It does mean:

Don't let them be the focus of your life

Set your heart on the Kingdom of God

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "...But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." Luke 12:31

It doesn't mean:

Ignore things in this world as you focus on heaven

It does mean:

Be most concerned about the things that concern God most

Jesus is a perfect model!

How do we know what our heart is set on?

What do you treasure?

What are our biggest worries and fears and cause for anger?

What do we put most of our 'disposable' time, money, and attention?

This is probably what our heart is set on

Jesus warned: good things in this life took people away from seeking His Kingdom

Life's necessities and pleasures: food and drink

Relationships: friendship, family, marriage

Career and possessions: buying, selling, farming

People's opinion of us

Visible success

Being treated well or justly or fairly

WHOM do you treasure? WHO is your King?

Whose opinion of you means most?

To whom do you turn in trouble or pain or grief or loss?

To whom do you turn in joy?

Whose guidance and teaching means most to you?

Other answers we often give...

Ourselves: find strength, guidance, comfort, hope within

Someone else: parent, spouse, mentor, ...

Something else: success, money, philosophy, politics, science, pleasure, work, substance, bitterness, grief, ...

Treasure our new King: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Daily follow Him

While the Kingdom is growing gradually

So we will be fully prepared when the Kingdom appears suddenly

Jesus warns us...

we can so easily have our hearts focused on the things of this life

that we will miss both the gradual growing and the sudden arrival of the Kingdom of God to our great loss

Jesus invites everyone to enter His Kingdom today through Him

And this is the King we worship...

For God the Father has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13-14

Let us worship and love and follow our King

while His Kingdom is growing gradually

until the day it appears suddenly and with great joy!

Reflection Questions for later today or this week...

1. What do you treasure most? In other words, what are the things that might be taking your heart away from loving God will your whole being?
2. Whom do you treasure most? Who is your hearted tempted to worship in place of Jesus as King?
3. Read Colossians 1:13-14 again. What does it mean that God the Father has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves?
4. What does it look like for you to seek Christ's Kingdom before all other things? What and who helps you do that?
5. What is one thing that should change in your life in order to seek Christ's Kingdom before all other things?