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“The Culture Before Christ’s Return”

[Luke 17:20-37](#)

Pastor Gary Hamrick

What will the SOCIAL and SPIRITUAL condition of the culture look like just prior to Jesus’ return? In [Luke 17:20-37](#) Jesus [said] it will be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot—a righteous minority living among a wicked majority. The wickedness in the world will not only be tolerated but celebrated too, and people will think it is “normal.” So how do we maintain the Biblical mission to win the world for Christ without allowing the world to influence us while we wait for Christ’s return? Pastor Gary shares the answer to that question in today’s teaching from [Luke 17](#).

1. The Coming of the Kingdom

- a. [Luke 17:20-37](#) – *“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’ Then He said to the disciples, ‘The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, “Look here!” or “Look there!” Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away.*

And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.' And they answered and said to Him, 'Where, Lord?' So He said to them, 'Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.'"

- b. Pastor Gary said, "Jesus said there, 'Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.' Some translations say vultures instead of eagles because the idea here is a bird of prey will feed on something dead ... but it is like a vulture, a scavenge animal. ... [What] Jesus [was] saying here [was] probably a common saying in his day, 'Where the body is, the eagles would be gathered together.' It's like 'Where there's smoke, there's fire.' All that that verse means is that when the conditions are ripe on the earth, then Jesus will return just as certainly as a bird of prey will go to a dead body."

2. The righteous will be the minority living among a wicked majority

a. Spiritual conditions

- i. Pastor Gary said, "And before Jesus returns ... certain social and spiritual conditions ... will be present in the earth just prior to his second coming. ... [Jesus warned] us about false prophets and false messiahs. That's verses twenty-two to twenty-four... He [warned] his disciples about the climate (the spiritual condition of the planet just prior to his second coming) will be such that people are so eager for his return they're going to unfortunately start to embrace all kinds of false teachers and false prophets thinking that it's Jesus, and Jesus [said], 'Don't run after them, don't follow them. ...' Don't think you've missed the second coming of Jesus. Jesus is going to come again, and everybody will know."

1. **Revelation 1:7a** - *"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him..."*

b. Social conditions

- i. Pastor Gary said, "Then [Jesus transitioned] into the social condition. ... He [said], 'Just prior to my second coming, the culture is going to be very similar to how it was in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot.' Now both of those men are mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Their lives were separated by about two hundred and fifty years, give or take, and they were both righteous men, along with their families living in very unrighteous times."

1. **Genesis 6:5-8** - *"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of*

his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

- ii. Pastor Gary said, "And that's why God rescued Noah and his family and saved them from the flood, which was judgment upon the earth, because Noah had grace in God's eyes. Similarly, Jesus [said] it'll be like the days of Lot. ... God was grieved about all of the wickedness and sexual perversion of Sodom and Gomorrah. ... God determined to destroy those two cities, but before he did, he sent two angels who came in human form to literally rescue Lot and his family out of those cities, to physically take them out."

- 1. **Genesis 19:16** – *"And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city."*

3. Wickedness in the world will not only be tolerated but celebrated as normal and routine

- a. Pastor Gary said, "In the midst of that wickedness and evil and perversion, life is going to go on like normal because people are going to tolerate it and celebrate it like normal."

- i. **Luke 17:26-28** – *"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built."*

- b. Pastor Gary said, "They were productive. They went to work. Life was 'normal,' while everything else going on around them was anything but. ... They were so desensitized to it. ... They were unfazed. Now, not Noah and Lot – they were very fazed. They were very troubled by what was happening in their world. But Jesus [said] that not only will there be wickedness increasingly so in the world and in the culture before he returns, but people will tolerate and celebrate it like it's just normal, and life will go on for everybody else, except those who are trying to live a godly life, like the Noahs and the [Lots] of their day."

- i. **2 Peter 2:7-8** – *"...Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless*

deeds).”

- c. Pastor Gary said, “You ever felt oppressed in your spirit by some of the things that you see happening in your world today? Have you ever felt tormented by the stuff that you see and hear? It’s to be expected if you’re going to live a godly life, trying to please the Lord in a very ungodly world; your spirit’s going to feel oppressed. It’s going to feel ... heavy and burdensome in our world.”

4. God will rescue the righteous and bring judgment upon a wicked world

- a. Pastor Gary said, “Just as God rescued Noah and his family and Lot and his family before he brought judgment, he will do the same for those Believers before he brings judgment on the earth, and this is what he meant between verses thirty-four and thirty-six. When Jesus [talked] about two men in a bed, one will be taken, the other left (and there’s nothing funny going on there) it’s just, you know, two guys are hanging out and they were, you know, in the same bed. ... Two women will be grinding grain; one will be taken, the other left. Two men working in the field; one taken, the other left. What Jesus [was] alluding to here is what we call the Doctrine of the Rapture. ... God will physically take some people from the earth just before he brings judgment upon the earth. The righteous he will take. The unrighteous, who have rejected him, they’re going to suffer the consequences of their wickedness, rejecting God in a wicked world. ... This is why it’s important for us to get right with God now because we don’t know when he’s going to return, and so we want to be ready to go with him to be taken safely into heaven because judgment is coming upon the earth. ... Just as God was faithful to rescue Noah and his family with the provision of an ark before he brought judgment in the form of a flood upon the world, and God was faithful to send angels to physically take Lot and his family out of Sodom before he rained down burning sulfur on those twin cities, God will also rescue the righteous before he brings judgment upon the earth. ... We can rest in this, and we can trust God about this.”

- i. **1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17a** - *“... And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”*
- ii. **2 Peter 2:9** - *“Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”*

5. We have a mission

- a. Pastor Gary said, “Before God rescues us and then judges the world, we have a mission ... to win the world for Christ. We must not retreat, ... but the question becomes, ‘How do we maintain our biblical mission to win the world

for Christ, while at the same time protecting ourselves from its ungodly influence?’... There are two opposing missions going on in the world today. ... The world’s mission is, ‘You all be conformed to us, to our values, our philosophy, our culture, our trends, our beliefs, our system.’... Whereas our mission, the mission of the church, the mission of those who are followers of Jesus, is to help people become transformed by the person and power of Jesus Christ, and when that happens, your values, your beliefs, your objectives, your desires, your standards change, and they’re very different from the world’s. ... The world is aggressively trying to recruit you and your children to be conformed, and they will shame you. ... They’ll shame you and try to browbeat you into conforming. If you don’t do that, then they’ll start to persecute. And we should not think ourselves exempt from what the rest of the Christian world is experiencing around the world, which is persecution. We should not think [to] ourselves, ‘Well, we’ll forever be exempt from that.’”

- i. **2 Timothy 3:12** – *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* (1984 NIV)
- b. Pastor Gary said, “We can’t abandon our mission. God has given us a mission to reach this world.”
 - i. **Jude 20** – *“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith ...”* (1984 NIV)
- c. Pastor Gary said, “You and I must not neglect our personal attention and devotion to the Word of God and prayer. These are days in which we must personally be responsible to take our Bibles, carve out time to seek the Lord and get alone with him, and read our Bibles, and pray and seek his face and be strengthened to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. We have to take personal responsibility for that. ... In addition, there’s this corporate aspect of coming together like we’re doing right now, coming together in large group settings or in small group settings. ... We need to encourage one another. We need to strengthen one another. We need to be studying God’s word together, both personally and corporately.”
 - i. **Hebrews 10:25** – *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (1984 NIV)
- d. Pastor Gary said, “We [have] to go out into the world, but we have to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. We have to encourage one another. We have to be strong in the Lord so we can be faithful to the mission. If we are to go out, we must first be built up, so that we can still represent him without the influence of the world penetrating our own hearts.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Luke 17:20-37](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together?” (See #1b above)
3. What will the spiritual conditions be like on the earth just prior to Jesus’ return? (See #2a-i above)
4. Is it possible for Believers to miss Jesus’ return? Why or why not? (See #2a-i-1 above)
5. Read [Genesis 6:5-8](#). What will the social conditions be like on the earth just prior to Jesus’ return? (See #2b-i and #2b-ii above)
6. Reread [Luke 17:26-28](#). As wickedness increases on the earth, what will people be doing? (See #3a and #3b above).
7. Read [2 Peter 2:7-8](#). What can we expect to sometimes feel when we try to follow the Lord in today’s culture? (See #3c above)
8. Read [1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17a](#) and [2 Peter 2:9](#). Should Christians worry about themselves in relation to God’s coming judgment of the earth? (See #4a above)
9. What mission has God given Christians? (See #5a and #5b above)
10. Read [Jude 20](#). What practical things should we do to “build” ourselves “up in our most holy faith?” (See #5c and #5d above)
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)