

Signs of the Second Coming—Global Judgment

Jack Hughes

May 9, 2010

We're going to finish up the section [in Luke 17] dealing with the end times and the judgment of the end times this morning. Hopefully, as we go through here, we're going to be unraveling a lot of mysteries. There's a lot of stuff here, but it's really fascinating. I think you're going to find this quite wonderful and amazing. At least, I did.

If you take in the news a little bit, you've probably heard people talking about one-world government. For instance, according to *Forbes* online magazine, April 29, 2010—just a week ago—it says: “The president of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, told *Forbes* that global governance is extremely necessary if we want to prevent another financial crisis.”¹ Here we have a statement by this pretty major player in the financial realm, saying that what we really need is a one-world government. A while back, you [might have thought], “We're not going to have a one-world government. The Bible says we're going to, but it just [doesn't] seem very likely.” Well, it's becoming more likely.

About a year ago, someone gave me a children's book called *War and Peace* by [Michael Twinn]. It targets those who are about three to six years

¹Mia Saini, “ECB President Favors Global Governance,” *Forbes.com*, April 29, 2010. Available at: <http://blogs.forbes.com/face-to-face/2010/04/29/ecb-president-favors-global-governance/>.

of age. It's one of those typical children's books with a glossy cover, bright colors, lots of pictures, and few words. It talks about [how] families disagree and [that] they need to do [so] in a nice way. [It then goes on to discuss how] sometimes neighbors disagree and they need to do [so] in a nice away. [And] sometimes politicians and political parties [do the same]. Finally, [the book] gets to [the fact that] countries disagree and war is never the answer. It has a strong anti-war, anti-weapon message that it gives over and over again. [It says that] those who join the military are really kind of crazy and silly and we shouldn't be fighting each other. We should just be nice, be good to each other, and talk things out.

At this point, any adult reader who is not exceedingly naïve will be thinking to [himself], “Well, peace is good, but what about all the evil men in the world who want to rob, plunder, mass murder, and oppress [people] for their own selfish purposes? Are we just going to lay down our arms and let those people ruin our lives and the lives of other people?” The solution is then given in this book: “It may take centuries for nations to learn to resolve disputes peacefully. There may be a need for a world government, with sufficient military strength at its command. Powerful nations may need to cede control of weapons.” Now just stop there. Have you ever heard any kid say “cede”? I was just thinking [that] that's a pretty big word, isn't it? Yeah. “Cede that peanut butter and jelly sandwich over here.” It's a pretty big word.

The reason they use that word is they didn't really want to say what they meant, which was “take away the weapons of stronger nations by force.” It goes on: “Weaker nations may agree not to arm. A peacekeeping force will keep armies apart.”² So, all of this, when interpreted, means [that there should be a] push for a one-world government, with a one-world army that forces the powerful nations to give up their arms and, with absolute power, will be the first case in history [in which] absolute power will not corrupt.

²Michael Twinn (illustrations by Toni Goffe), *War and Peace* (Swindon: Child's Play (International) Ltd., 1996), n.p.

In 1990, when communism in Russia fell, everybody was rejoicing because democracy ha[d] had another triumph. But, you know, democracy usually leads to materialism, greed, indulgence, and that's not working very well either, is it? Freedom, democracy, [and] fair trade only work when freedom is restrained by biblical morals. Democracy only works when it is carried out by honest men. Fair trade only works when it is carried out by the rules of fair trade.

The two most important and critical factors that intersect with what's going on in the world are never mentioned. You can listen to the news until you're petrified in your chair and you wouldn't hear the[m]. They are the most important things that need to be talked about. The first is the depravity of man. That is a problem. If you are trying to talk about how to make the world a good place, you have to find out how to deal with the depravity of man. Men are sinners. Men are selfish. Men are greedy, murderous beings. And, when given the opportunity, they usually do what's wrong.

Second, they overlook the important fact that God is all-sovereign and, in the words of Isaiah, has declared the end from the beginning [see Isaiah 46:10]. This tells us that, yes, men are evil, so human solutions will not work. The government can't save you, politics can't save you, an economic plan can't save you. What you need is a Savior to save you. History is not cyclical, repeating itself. It's not random, ping-ponging off of one random thing after another. It is purposeful, [with] an all-sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful God moving history to His intended purposes. As it was drilled into me in my seminary days, the *telos* of history is doxological. When I looked that up, I discovered that [it] meant [that] the end of history is to bring praise and glory to God. The *telos*—the end—of history is doxological—that which brings praise and glory to God. That is where the Bible is headed and that's what we get a glimpse of when we look into the prophetic portions of the end times.

As Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:[13], things “will proceed from bad to worse,” and that's what we've been learning in Luke 17:22 and following, as Jesus focuses primarily on the judgment that will fall upon wicked men

during the end times. You might be thinking to yourself, “Why do we have to talk about this? Why does Jesus teach us about [it]? Why doesn’t it just happen? What is the purpose of telling us that judgment is coming and [to] ‘flee from the wrath to come’ [see Luke 3:7]?” Well, there are several good reasons.

[The] first [reason is] because it gives Christians hope. Those Christians who are living in the end times will realize that, yes, they are going to be rescued from the judgment, the death, the plagues, the famines, [and] the wrath of the antichrist, etc. Second, it motivates believers to live their lives for Christ because who wants to be engaging in [his] favorite sin when Jesus shows up? So, there is a lot of discussion in the New Testament about making sure, knowing Christ can come at any moment, to be doing what He would have you be doing.

Third, it motivates Christians to share the gospel. When you see the judgments that are coming upon the world of ungodly men and you know you’re an ungodly person and that you’ve been saved by grace, then you realize, “You know what? I was lost like all the rest of the lost people. I was living my life for myself like all the rest of the lost people. I didn’t want to submit to God, just like all the rest of the lost people. Then I came in contact with the gospel, and, by the grace of God, I was saved.” When you understand that—that we’re all sinners, we’re all humanity, none of us deserve to be saved, and that there’s going to be judgment for those who don’t know Christ—it makes you want to get out there and say, “Can I talk to you about Jesus?” Fourth and finally, it threatens the wicked to repent and believe, or else be swept away with judgment.

So, these are the purposes [for which] Jesus is pulling His disciples aside. He has pulled them aside, and we are looking into this conversation because it is for us as well. So, starting in Luke 17:22, Jesus tells the disciples they will long to see the days of the Son of Man, but they’re not going to see them because He’s not going to come back during their generation. So, when Jerusalem falls, and all [those] terrible thing[s] happen then, they’re going to wish they could see Him, but it’s for a future generation. He says that

generation needs to be careful because if they say, “Here is the Christ!” and “There is the Christ!” don’t go there. Jesus says, “When I come back, no one is going to wonder what’s happening. No one is going to miss it. No one is going to sleep through it. Every eye will see. There will be a global revealing” [see Luke 17:22–23]. You say, “Well, how does that work?” God can do anything. I don’t know [how it will work]. He’ll reflect Jesus off the atmosphere. I’m not sure. I don’t know. But, it will be clear like lightning from east to the west [see Luke 17:24].

Then [Jesus] warned [the disciples] that there’s going to be a time [when] [people] are going to have [to] run for their lives. If they’re on the roof of their house, sunning themselves on their sundeck, or in the evening enjoying the cool breeze, there is going to be a time when their lives are in such serious peril that they should just run down and run to the east. Or, if they’re in the field plowing or whatever, and they learn about some certain time, they’re going to have to run to the east [see Luke 17:30–31].

Why [should they run to the east]? Well, because to the east of Judea is the Jordan Rift and then up the other side are the desert regions, the mountains of Moab and Edom, and that is where God is going to protect the Jews during the last half of the Tribulation when the Abomination of Desolation occurs [see Matthew 24:15–18; Mark 13:14–16]. That is, when the antichrist, halfway through the Tribulation—those seven years preceding the Second Coming of Christ—declares himself to be God [and] defiles the temple, he then says, “Wipe out the Jews.” Why? [It is] because the Jews aren’t going to worship him. Jesus says, “When that happens, run for your [lives].” We learned last week that God is actually going to provide some sort of air transport. Whether this will be angelic transport, Star Trek beaming, [or] helicopters, I don’t know, but He’s going to transport them. They are going to fly over there so they don’t have to go all the way to the Dead Sea and up the other side. There they will be protected by God for three-and-a-half years before Christ returns in glory.

So, this is a little bit of what we’ve been learning. We’re going to continue on this morning where we left off in a text that has a lot of little mysteries in

it. We're going to solve them this morning. Look at Luke 17 and we'll read verses 34–37. Jesus says:

“I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.” And answering they said to Him, “Where, Lord?” And He said to them, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.”

From this text, there [are] two items you need to consider: first, examples of judgment, and second, the location of judgment. Now, let's just first start by looking at these examples of judgment. Look at [Luke 17:]34: “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left.” So, picture in your mind a married couple. There's a believer and an unbeliever. They've made it through the Tribulation, the trials, all these things that are happening, and they're in bed. All of a sudden, one is taken and the other is left.

He goes on in [Luke 17:]35: “There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left.” At that time, if you wanted to get some flour, you took some grain down to the local mill. There [were] big upper and lower millstone[s], with a hole in the center of the upper millstone. They would pour in the grain, the millstone would be turned, [and] as it was turned, the grain would be ground into flour, come out the side, and be collected. So, [during the course of this process] there was a time when you were standing around, [waiting for the flour to be made]. Jesus could have said [that] two women were sitting in the Laundromat surfing the Internet on their laptops, but that wouldn't have been understood [at that time]. So, they're grinding wheat and one is taken and the other is left.

Look at [Luke 17:]36. Now, if you have the English Standard version or the New International version, [Luke 17:]36 isn't in your Bible, which I will

explain in a minute. If you have the New American Standard Bible, you'll notice that it's in brackets, and if you have the New King James version or the King James version, you'll notice it's just there. You're probably asking yourself, "Well, why do some versions contain verse 36 and other versions don't? Why does the New American Standard Bible put it in brackets with a little footnote and other versions just have it in there?" Well, let me explain. For thousands of years, the Bible was copied by hand. Sometimes those copyists made mistakes. This is a particular kind of mistake called accidental harmonization. You see, in Matthew 24:40–41, it says this: "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left." [The illustration of] "two men are in the field, one is taken and one left" [is] in this parallel text [to our Luke 17 passage]. Well, scribes in that time were very familiar with the Bible [and] had much of the Bible memorized, and so, sometimes if [they] were copying a familiar text, [they] would accidentally insert something from a parallel text. There would be an accidental harmonization. That is what occurred here.

Let me just give you an example [of how this can happen]. This is kind of fun. Let me take a text that is really well-known—that you all know. I'm going to pause and you just fill in the gaps, OK? Here is the Lord's Prayer, or the Disciples' Prayer. "So when you pray, pray. . ."

[Congregation]: "Our Father." OK, wrong. [It is] just "Father." So, "Father. . ."

"Who is in heaven," right? Wrong. "Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come. . ."

[Congregation]: "Your will be done." Wrong. "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." You may be thinking, "Doesn't it say 'trespasses' or 'debts and debtors'?" No. "And lead us not into temptation, but. . ."

[Congregation]: "Deliver us from evil." Wrong, because I am reading from Luke 11:2–4 and you filled in from Matthew 6. You see, it's almost irresistible, isn't it, to fill in those gaps? It's "Our Father," and even if you

have a modern version, it's still "who art in heaven." "Art" is better than "are," right? You just want to say, "hallowed be Your name." You just want to say, "who [art] in heaven" and then "hallowed be Your name," and then "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth." It just draws you in. You want to put that in there, but really the text doesn't say that. "Deliver us from evil," you just want to put in there, "For Yours is the power, and the kingdom, and the glory forever and ever." You just want to put that in there, right? I mean, it's good.

The text [in Luke 11:2–4] says: "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation"—period. So you can see, if you were translating Luke, how it would be very easy to do an accidental harmonization. Well, if you're a scribe and you really know the whole Bible, it's very easy to do that. This [instance in Luke 17:36] is one of those cases. That is why it doesn't appear in the ESV and the NIV because they were translating and none of the earliest manuscripts (which are the oldest manuscripts—the earliest being the closest to the time when they were originally written) contain that verse.

You say, "Well, then [why do] the New King James and King James have it? They don't even have a bracket around it." [It is] because [when] the King James version was translated, they only had later manuscripts [in which the verse] had been added in. Those [were] the only [manuscripts] they had [to go from]. The New American Standard realizes, "You know, some people are going to read this and say, 'Where is it?' so let's put it in brackets and put a footnote." So that's what they did. So, mystery solved.

The good thing is [that the language found in Luke 17:36] does appear in Matthew 24:40, so we'll just comment on it anyway, all right? Here you have this statement. You've got people in the field, and one is taken and another left. You have people grinding; one is taken, the other left. Two people [are] in bed; one is taken and another left. The whole point is [that] they're taken, right? They're taken. Now, this is going to be so fun. As soon

as you read that, what do you think comes to mind? They're taken because of the Rapture. They're Raptured out of there—choom! They're out of there.

This is our first [principle] of Bible study [about which] we need to be careful: Be very careful not to assume you understand a text upon first reading. A lot of times we'll read a text, and say, "Well, obviously it seems to be talking about the Rapture." [It seems that] you're right because one is taken, right? The principle is [that] whenever you study the Bible, [you must] try to lay aside your biases and your assumptions. We all have biases and assumptions [and] we can't lay them aside perfectly, but we need to try to do so as best we can when we interpret a passage so the passage can speak to us. We cannot have our eyes blinded by what we assume [a passage] says before studying [it].

Let's just say [this portion of Scripture is about] the Rapture. So now let's look at a couple Rapture texts [to] see if those texts actually do support what we see here. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 15, if you want to turn there. This is one of the key Rapture texts—[the] whole chapter is on the resurrection. False teachers came in, and said, "There is no resurrection," so Paul had to write back and say, "Yes, [there is]." The whole chapter is an argument for the resurrection, that it's a cardinal doctrine, that if Christ has not been raised, then we're not going to be raised, we're still in our sin, and Christianity is just a farce.

Notice what [Paul] says in 1 Corinthians 15:50–53. He says: "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." In other words, if you're going to heaven, if you're going to be resurrected, you're not going to take your mortal body with you. You need a new one, which is pretty obvious and thankfully [so]. The older you get, the more thankful you are. [He continues in 1 Corinthians 15:]51: "Behold, I tell you a mystery." This is a critical word, this word "mystery" here. It is used a few times in the New Testament. It refers to information that has never before been given. This is new doctrine, new information, cool little stuff. "I'm going to tell you," in other words, "a secret, a mystery." What is it, Paul? [He goes on to say]:

“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” What do[es he] mean? Well, we’re not going to all sleep. Sleep is a euphemism for death. We’re not all going to die. Some of us are going to be walking around. We’re going to leave church, it’s going to be Sunday, Mother’s Day, we’re going to be walking from the church building to our car[s], and we will be changed. (The Mother’s Day thing—you can’t see it. It’s in the white spaces.)

[You say], “Well, how fast is this going to happen?” It’s going to happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” [1 Corinthians 15:52] It says [that] not only are we going to be instantaneously changed in the “twinkling of an eye” (I don’t know how fast that is, but it’s fast), but the dead in Christ are also going to be raised. This is new. “You mean there are going to be people who are going to be actually walking around and all of a sudden, instantaneously, they’re going to receive glorified bodies and change? That the dead are going to be raised from the dead, resurrected, imperishable? And we’re going to be changed in that same way?” Yeah. [Look at 1 Corinthians 15:]53: “For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.” So you say, “Cool!” If you’ve studied the Resurrection, you know that resurrection is spoken of in the Old Testament and in the New Testament before this. [However], Paul is revealing some new data here, new doctrine—this doctrine of the instantaneous change and Rapture/resurrection of believers at a certain point. He doesn’t say what [that point] is.

I’m going to read John 5:28–29, [which] captures what the Old Testament teaches [about resurrection]. “Do not marvel at this,” Jesus says, “for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” So, resurrection was already taught, it was already known before Paul wrote [1 Corinthians 15]. You’re [thinking], “OK, so the Jews already knew, the disciples already knew, everybody already knew about resurrection of both unbelievers and believers at some point in time.” But [in 1 Corinthians 15],

Paul says, “There is something I’m going to tell you that’s new and that is [that] there is going to be a sequence [in which] some believers are going to still be alive, they’re going to [be] walk[ing] around, and be instantaneously changed, not before the dead in Christ were raised imperishable, then we will be changed and raised after them.” So, that’s all we know from that text.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians [4]. This is another text on what’s going to happen in what is often known as the Rapture of the Saints. By the way, the word “rapture” comes from the Latin version of the Greek word *harpodzo*. The Greek word is the word [from which] we get [the English word] “harpoon.” Just think of fishermen standing on the deck and stabbing fish and jerking them into the boat. They’re snatching them out of the water with a harpoon. Well, thankfully, God doesn’t spear believers, but He does snatch them away. He harpoons them, so to speak, from this earth into heaven. This is what Paul is writing about in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Some more false teachers have come in, and said, “The Day of the Lord has already happened. It’s already gone.”

The [Thessalonian believers asked], “Really?”

The [false teachers replied], “Yes, the day of the Lord has already happened and it has gone away.”

[In response to this false teaching], Paul writes this: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep,” again, those who have died—a euphemism for death. “So that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” So far, really nothing new has been given. All we’re being told here is that we believe that Jesus died and rose again [and] God is going to bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. So, in other words, those who have died will be resurrected. OK, that’s pretty much all Old Testament knowledge.

[Paul continues in 1 Thessalonians 4:]15: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.” This is a little bit of new information. It tells the sequence. It tells that, yes, there are going to

be people alive and what's going to happen is [that] they are going to be resurrected. It's not going to be until after those who are already dead, or asleep, are resurrected, but [those who are still alive] will be [resurrected]. Verse 16: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Here's the sequence. "Then we who are alive and remain," walking around on earth alive, "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." We know from 1 Corinthians 15 that when we are caught up, we receive immortal, imperishable bodies, just [as] Christ [did] after His resurrection. So this is the Rapture, the catching away of the Church.

Now, let's talk about a few Bible study principles that can help us understand [if] our text in Luke 17 [is] talking about the Rapture, or [if] it is talking about something else. See if you can follow this. There is a Bible study principle that is called progressive revelation. You say, "What's that?" Well, progressive revelation means that over the course of time, God reveals more and more information to us about different subjects. For instance, if you take Jesus, He is [first] alluded to in Genesis 3:15: the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head. That's all we know [at that point]. Later on, in the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis, we are told that in Abraham's seed, speaking of Christ, "all the nations of the earth will be blessed" [see Genesis 22:18]. Later on, we are told, at the end of Genesis, that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" [Genesis 49:10], so we know [Jesus] is going to be from Judah. Then in Exodus, He's pictured as the Lamb that is slain in the Passover. If you look at [the information] as kind of a wedge, you see that as the wedge gets bigger, [with] more and more information added as the Scriptures progress. We aren't told everything in the first chapter of Genesis. Revelation progresses.

Here is the principle: If you're studying this passage at this point in the Bible, and later on, afterwards, a doctrine is revealed, you cannot take that doctrine and freight it back into a text when it wasn't revealed yet.

That would be to violate the doctrine of progressive revelation. So, if Paul revealed the doctrine of the Rapture—it was a mystery until 1 Corinthians 15—Jesus could not be speaking of it in Luke 17. Huh.

Not only that, there are some other things we need to consider. Let's try [to] figure out if our text is speaking of the Second Coming or the Rapture. Let's do a compare and contrast between the Rapture and the Second Coming and see which one best fits our text. We don't have time to look through [each Scripture passage, but] I preached on this a while back—you can get the sermon online—[if you want more information].³

At the Rapture, Jesus comes back *for* the Church to catch them up into heaven. At the Second Coming, He comes back *with* His Church to establish His kingdom on earth. The Rapture was first discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. The Second Coming was taught in both Old and New Testaments before that time. In the Rapture, living believers are instantaneously glorified and caught up into heaven to be with the Lord in the air. At the Second Coming, believers are rescued, they aren't glorified, and they enter into the kingdom as mortals. After the Rapture, glorified believers remain with Christ in the air. After the Second Coming, believers rule and reign with Christ in His kingdom. They live in His kingdom, right?

The Rapture is imminent and it could happen any moment for Christ to come back for His Church, but the Second Coming is not going to happen until after the Tribulation. The Rapture is a time of salvation and blessing for believers only, but the Second Coming is a time of salvation for believers and judgment for unbelievers. The Rapture happens *before* God's wrath is poured out on earth. The Second Coming happens *after* God's wrath is poured out on earth. After the Rapture, unbelievers will remain alive on the earth during the Tribulation. After the Second Coming, all unbelievers will be executed and only believers will remain on earth to enter into the kingdom.

³Jack Hughes, "The Rapture of the Church," June 14, 2009. Available at: <http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2009/20090614>.

So, by merely looking at the Rapture texts and Second Coming texts, we're saying, "You know what? Luke 17 is looking like [it is talking about the] Second Coming. It's got to be Second Coming." So, by cross-reference—that's the principle—we've looked up texts and contrasted and compared them—cross-references—[and they seem to say that Luke 17 is about the] Second Coming, too. These things inform us that our text must be talking about the Second Coming.

There's another way we can use cross-reference. Not only can we look up Rapture and Second Coming texts and compare and contrast them, [but] we can also say, "Well, are there any texts—cross-references—that we can look at [that] talk about what happens right before or at the time Jesus returns to earth so we can see if that matches our [text in Luke 17]?" There are. There are some general texts, [such as] Matthew 25:31 and following, [which talks about] the judgment of the sheep and goats, but that's pretty vague. It just talks about how there will be sheep and goats—believers and unbelievers—and they will be separated. The believers will enter the kingdom and the goats will be judged and cast into hell, but it doesn't really give us a sequence, so that text isn't very helpful. But there are some texts [that] do give us a sequence, which is what we're looking for because in our text, one is taken and another is left, so who is taken, who is left, why [are they taken], where [are they taken]? These are the questions that come up.

Let's look at Matthew 13. This is the parable of the tares and the wheat. If you've read your Bible very much, you probably know about this [parable]. We're going to look at the punch line and the interpretation. The world is pictured as a field in which the enemy of God—Satan—has sown bad seed, or tares. Tares are weeds that look very much like wheat. You can't really tell what a tare is and what the wheat is until harvest time when they have developed grain and you see [w]hat's wheat and [w]hat isn't. The question [posed by this parable] is: Should the Church be running around on witch hunts trying to extract unbelievers from the congregation, or attacking them in society and exterminating them from the earth? Should we try to separate them? Jesus answers in [Matthew 13:]30: "Allow both to grow together until

the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

You’re thinking, “OK, well, that’s good, but what does all this mean?” Thankfully, the disciples didn’t understand very much either, and they did one of those things that we love, and [asked], “Could you tell us what this means?” Jesus interprets this [parable]. If you look down at [Matthew 13:]37, you’ll see the interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares. Starting in [Matthew 13:]37, Jesus says:

The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. [Matthew 13:37–39]

Is[n’t] that about as clear as you can get? Yeah, that’s pretty clear, isn’t it? [He goes on in Matthew 13:]40: “So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.” Unbelievers will be gathered up and burned with fire. Verse 41: “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom. . . .” Notice Jesus is going to establish His kingdom on earth. He doesn’t want any unbelievers there, so He extracts them from the earth. They’re gathered up out of His kingdom. “. . . All stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS” who remain on earth, who are still alive, who are still mortals, “WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear” [Matthew 13:41–43]. First the wicked are collected and judged, then the righteous enter the kingdom described as God’s barn. In our text [in Luke 17], one is taken and the other is left. Hmmm.

Let’s look at another text: Revelation 14. At the beginning of the chapter, [it] talks about the 144,000 Jews that are sealed during the Tribulation to be

witnesses for God. In [Revelation 14:]7, an angel warns the people: “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come,” so it’s toward the end of the Tribulation—that seven-year period of time. God is getting ready to judge the earth [and] Christ is coming back in glory.

This is what we read in Revelation 14:14–20: “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man.” This is pretty much an exact quotation of the same imagery that you read of in Daniel 7:13–14, so we’re talking about Jesus. We also know that because it says: “Having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.” There are two words for crown. One speaks of a little laurel wreath that victors at [events such as the] Olympian games would win. The other is a gold crown of royalty that kings wore. [The term used in this verse] is the gold-crown term. [Revelation 14:]15 [says]:

And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. [Revelation 14:15–16]

If you’re comparing this with the parable of the tares, the wheat is harvested and brought into the barn. You think, “Well, these are probably believers.” Verse 17 [continues]:

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” [14:17–18]

You’re thinking, “OK, well, who is this? Who is being harvested? Who [is] being gathered here?” Verse 19:

So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles. [14:19–20]

It's obviously not believers, OK? So, notice there is a gathering, a trodding under foot, of the grapes, which represent unbelievers in the wine press of the wrath of God.

Finally, when we come to our text [in Luke 17], we have to consider the king of all Bible study principles, which is context. Context is king. So, we go back to Luke [17] again, and we say, "OK, the Rapture doesn't seem to work. It wasn't revealed yet. Not only that, we've looked at some texts that give us sequence [and] tell us that first unbelievers are extracted from the earth and cast into hell and believers, who are alive at the end of the Tribulation, enter as mortals into the kingdom. So, we're pretty sure at that point that those who are taken are taken away to judgment. That just happens to be what the near context of Luke 17 is talking about, isn't it? [It is talking about] the judgment of unbelievers. You've seen it. We could argue, and say, "But the illustration of Noah was given and Noah and his family were saved and Lot and his two daughters were saved." That's true, but the emphasis of the passage is on the judgment of unbelievers, so that also emphasizes that th[o]se that are taken away are taken away to judgment.

So let's put this all together. The Bible study principle of progressive revelation teaches [that Luke 17:34–37] could [not] be speaking of the Rapture because it wasn't revealed yet. The principle of cross-reference by comparing Second Coming and Rapture texts revealed that [Luke 17:34–37] leans to[ward] the Second Coming. Finally, near context also reveals that these people being discussed are being judged. So, who is taken away? Unbelievers [are taken away]. Who takes them away? The holy angels [take them away]. Where are they taken? They are taken] to judgment. Who is

left? Believers [are left]. Why are they left? [They are left so they may] enter into the kingdom.

Now, we move into the second point [of this sermon], which relates [to what we've just figured out]. I'm gong to hit you [with] one more thing. I'm going to show you about another bias that['s] going to [make you say], "Oh." You'll see it. It will come upon you like dead mackerel. All right. [The second point is]: Consider the location of judgment. Jesus has just given these illustrations: one will be taken, another left. One will be taken, another left. When He says that, what questions come to your mind? What comes to my mind is: Who are taken and [to] where are they taken? Isn't that what you want to ask? So, where are they taken and who is taking them?

Look at [Luke 17:]37: "And answering they said to Him, 'Where, Lord?'" They only need to ask [that] one question. Why? [It is] because if you know the destination of these people [who] are taken, it is going to tell you whether they are believers or unbelievers, right? Yeah. Very fun. "And He said to them," to their question asking about location: "Where are these people who are taken taken to?" Answer: "Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered." Now, I don't know about you, but this tormented me. I'm always reading ahead when I'm studying [the] passage[s on which I'm going to preach]. I know I'm going to be moving along through Luke, so I'm always reading ahead multiple chapters. By the time I get there, I've really got the passage down in my mind. I think I know what it says. I haven't studied it in-depth; I've just kind of been pondering it, meditating on it, [and] looking at the context.

This whole vulture thing tormented me. The reason it tormented me is because when I was growing up, I grew up on the border of a national forest, and I was very familiar with buzzards, [which] is what we called them. Vultures would fly in the air and you could be out in the forest and see them circling and you would march in that direction and you would find a dead deer carcass or elk carcass in the forest. Here's an example of bias (this isn't the one I'm going to hit you with, but [it] is an example of bias). I instantly thought, "The vultures are a sign in the sky. They're a sign in the

sky that we can see. Jesus is coming back.” That’s not what [the verse is] talking about, but that’s what I thought, see? But then I thought, “OK, I need to look at the context. I need to step back here and look at the plain, simple flow of the passage.”

Jesus says, “There are going to be some people going through the normal routines of life. One is going to be taken, and the other is going to be left.”

[The disciples] say, “Where? [To] Where are these people taken, Lord?”

Jesus says, “There is going to be a body left.”

Now, in our text here, the word “body” just means “body,” but in the parallel text of Matthew 24:28, the word “corpse” is used—[it uses] the [Greek] word [that is] translated “corpse” or “carcass.” We’re talking about a dead body, for certain. Of course, our [text] alludes to that because vultures are circling. [The word translated as vultures is] a word that can be used of vultures, eagles, or just birds of prey. Contrary to what some commentaries will tell you, eagles do eat carrion. The kind of bird doesn’t matter, but they are circling because there is a dead body. So, wherever these people are taken, there is a dead body left over.

Does that solve it for you? Just think about it. Does it solve it? Is it coming to your mind? It couldn’t be the Rapture because at the Rapture what happens to the bodies of believers? They’re taken. There is no body left in the ground. It could be the Resurrection because of believers who have already died—those people are in the ground. Their bodies aren’t lying *on* the ground. So the only people left are unbelievers whose bodies collapse into a heap when God sends forth His angels to extract their spirits from them and cast them into hell. They don’t go into hell with their mortal bodies. Their mortal bodies stay on earth to return to dust again. They are resurrected later, which we’ll look at in a second.

Here’s the shocker: When we were reading the text, and I said, “One is taken and the other is left,” you were thinking that [the person’s] body disappeared, [weren’t you]? But what happens when one of our loved ones dies and we say what? “The Lord took them home.” Where is the body? [It is] still here. So, in other words, there are going to be two people in bed

and all of a sudden, one person is going to wake up next to a corpse. There are going to be two people in a field, and when Christ comes back, all of a sudden, one of them is going to drop dead. Why? Because when Christ comes back, He sends forth His angels to the four ends of the earth and they gather all the wicked out of His kingdom and cast them into hell, [that's why]. Their bodies collapse and are left on the earth, food for vultures.

You might be thinking to yourself, “Man, that is *gnarly*. Could we kick up the old principle of cross-reference again and verify this?” Yes. Turn to Revelation 19. This is what is so fun about Bible study. It is so fun! I want you to know, I'm in my office all week, [thinking], “Man, I can't wait until Sunday to tell them this!” Revelation 19 is describing the Second Coming of Christ to earth to establish His kingdom. Believers have already been Raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation. This is the end of the Tribulation. They return with Christ in fine linen. Look at [Revelation 19:]11[-13]:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

We know who that is: Jesus. [Revelation 19:14 continues]: “And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.” These are the Raptured saints of the Church.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” [Revelation 19:15–16]

He's taking over the earth from Satan, demons, [and] evil men. He's taking over. [Revelation 19:]17: "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven." Hmm. What birds fly in midheaven? What birds do you see way up there, circling around? Eagles, buzzards, hawks—birds that eat carrion—[fly up there].

Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great. [19:17–18]

I want you to notice that last part—"free men and slaves, and small and great"—because it is going to come up in a minute. Here we are told that when Christ returns, what happens to all the unbelievers? Their spirits are what? [Their spirits are] extracted from them. Where are their bodies? [They are] left on earth. What happens [to the bodies]? The birds eat them. That is exactly what our text in Luke is saying. Amazing.

Look at Revelation 20. Let me just summarize the first ten verses. Christ has returned to earth. He binds Satan for a thousand years. The glorified saints are now to reign with Christ over the mortal saints that enter into the kingdom who are rescued at the end of the Tribulation. In Revelation 20:5, John says: "The rest of the dead," that is, the unbelievers, "did not come to life until the thousand years were completed." So, when [an] unbeliever is executed at the Second Coming, they aren't resurrected right then. They don't receive their immortal bodies fit for eternal judgment yet. It happens after Christ reigns for a thousand years—after the thousand years [are] completed.

Look at [Revelation 20:]11 and then we'll see how this is. "Then I saw a great white throne." This is called the Great White Throne Judgment because it says there [is] a great white throne. "And Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, the great and the small” ([do you] see that phrase that appeared [in Revelation 19:18?]),

standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Let’s go back to Luke 17, [where] Jesus says, “Let me tell you some more about the judgment of unbelievers. There are going to be two people in bed. You know what’s going to happen? One is going to wake up and discover that the other person has been taken—[his] spirit has been taken. Yeah, [his] body remains here on earth like everybody that dies and is taken. There are going to be two people at the Laundromat and one is going to be taken. There [are] going to be two people in the field, one is going to be taken.”

[The disciples] say: “Where are they going to be taken?”

[Jesus replies], “Well, I just want you to know, there’s going to be a body left.”

Oh. So, it’s not the Rapture. It’s not the Resurrection. It’s not the rescue of believers. It must be [that] the spirits of unbelievers are taken from them when Christ returns and gathers them all and removes them from His kingdom and sends forth the birds to dine on their flesh. [That’s] pretty grim, pretty gruesome.

Again, why do we need to know this? We stated it earlier. [First: We need to know this] because it gives Tribulation believers hope that Christ will return to earth and rescue them and usher [them] in[to] His kingdom. [Second]: These things are also here to motivate believers to live our lives

for Christ so we can be good witnesses, so people can see our good works, and glorify God who is in heaven. [Third]: It should motivate us to pray for the salvation of the lost, for revival, knowing that there will come a day when all the unbelievers will drop dead. Their bodies will be left; their spirits will be taken away to judgment. Four[th]: these truths threaten sinners to repent and believe [in] the Lord Jesus Christ or be swept away in judgment.

I'm sure there [are] some people here who don't know Christ, and you probably know you don't know Christ because you don't love the Lord, you don't live for Him, you don't read His Bible, you're not really committed. You don't really give, you don't really serve, you're just kind of going through the motions of religiosity. You may call yourself a Christian; you may not. Judgment is coming. You need to ask yourself, "Should I really keep gambling with my eternal soul because I want a little bit more of my pleasure, I don't want Jesus telling me what to do, I don't want anybody controlling my life?" Believe me, somebody *is* controlling your life. You're a slave to sin [see John 8:34] and Satan right now. The question is not is somebody controlling you, or will they control you? They *are* controlling you and will continue to control you.

You're either going to have Satan, your cruel taskmaster, who is going to give you all the sin and pleasure you want and then see that you're damned into hell, or you're going to have Jesus, who is going to save you, adopt you into His family, give you His Holy Spirit, give you the people of God, give you His Word, and give you "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" [Ephesians 1:3], and save you for all eternity. Then you're going to worship and serve Him.

You have a choice. "Choose this day whom you will serve" [see Joshua 24:15]. Will it be Christ or will it be Satan, sin, and self? You need to make that decision. [Ask yourself], "Who am I going to follow? Am I going to turn, repent of my sins, [and] follow Christ, or not?" This is what you need to do. You need to ask yourself: "Am I going to live for Christ or not?" Everyone will leave here today having rejected Christ, submitted to Him, or

rebell[ed] against Him. You who leave, having rebelled against Christ, you are in a dangerous place.

You may be thinking to yourself, “Well, I just want you to know, if I see all this Tribulation stuff happening, I’ll give my life to Christ.” You may die before that happens. You don’t know when you’re going to die. Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life, hung on a cross, was crucified for sinners, so that “whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life” [see John 3:16]. What are you waiting for?

There’s another group of people, I’m sure, that are sitting out there thinking to [themselves], “Jack, man, you don’t know. I am so messed up! I’ve got this sin. I’ve got that sin. I’ve got all these things. I’ve got these people who think I’m a Christian. I’ve got to get all this stuff sorted out. I’ve got to fix my life so when I come to Christ, He’ll say, ‘I’m glad you fixed yourself. I’ll save you now.’” No. Just come as you are, “without one plea, but that His blood was shed for thee.”⁴ Just come to Christ and let God change you from one glory to the next [see 2 Corinthians 3:18]. I want you to know [that] even if you’re a Christian, you’re never going to be perfect. You can ask any Christian that. We would like to be perfect, but we’re not. But God, by His grace, transforms us from one glory to the next, [in] the image of Christ. He’ll do that for you. He’ll give you His Holy Spirit, His Word, [and] the fellowship of the saints, and He’ll help you walk with Him. He wants you to humbly repent and believe [see Mark 1:15] in Him as your Lord and Savior. Do that this morning so that you are not in danger. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You for our text, which, though sobering and complex, reveals to us the grand purpose of Your end times judgment to rescue the righteous remnant [and] to judge the wicked of the earth. Father, if there is anybody here right now who doesn’t know You, who is holding out, who is putting up a hand against You, saying, “No, no,” may You break [him]. May You humble [him]. May [he] cry out in [his] heart, “Lord Jesus, save me.

⁴Taken from “Just As I Am,” by Charlotte Elliott.

I believe You died for me and rose again for my justification.” Save [him], Lord. Do not let [him] leave here putting [his] soul in peril of eternal death. Rescue [him] as only You can, for we cannot. And for the rest of us, may we be faithful to live for You, share the gospel for You, and anticipate the glory of Your coming. We pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible ®, ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.