

## I. Introduction

Good morning! This painting, by Valentin de Boulogne, shows the Apostle Paul deep in thought and prayer as he writes. Maybe Paul is writing to Timothy, perhaps he is penning those verses where he urged prayer for all people. That passage is followed by these words, **(1 Timothy 2:3-4), “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”** This is one of my favorite verses because it reveals God’s love for all people so clearly.



God is Creator of all and He loves every person that He has created. His heart desire is for each and every person to be saved. And He has provided a way for all to be saved through repenting of sins and believing in Jesus. God has prepared a way of salvation for all, but repentance and faith are necessary. It is not our favorite topic, but we need to know that those who refuse to turn away from sin and trust in Jesus will face judgment. God is righteous and He will judge all things. **Hebrews 9:27-28** puts it this way. **“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”** Death and judgment are certain, but salvation for those who trust in Jesus is equally certain. Let’s read Luke 17:20-37.

## II. Scripture Luke 17:20-37 (NIV)

[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." [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. [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. [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. [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." [37] "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

## III. Teaching

This passage begins with the Pharisees asking Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come, and it ends with the disciples asking, **“Where Lord?”** But I don’t think the disciples were asking about the Kingdom of God, I think they were asking where judgment would fall. Jesus’ answer seems mysterious at first, but I think it is probably just an idiomatic way of saying, “everywhere.” Wherever there is a dead body, the vultures gather. Wherever there is sin, judgment will fall.

Sodom was a place of terrible sin and that may have caused the disciples to think about judgment falling on a specific place, leading to their question, **“Where Lord?”** But, although Jesus used Sodom as an

example of how judgment will come suddenly, Jesus is really speaking about a future time when all sin will be judged. **Luke 17:29-30** say, **“But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”**

**“On the day the Son of Man is revealed,”** in other words, at the time of Jesus’ Second Coming, a great judgment will fall, and all who love evil will be destroyed. But some, like Lot, will be rescued. Those who love the Lord more than the pleasures of this world will be saved.

Lot and his family had to leave Sodom in haste in order to save their lives. John Martin painted the scene like this. It is a terrible scene of destruction, but you can see that Lot and his daughters are safe. Sadly, Lot’s wife did not heed the warnings of the angels and she could not resist looking back at her old home, And as Genesis 19:26 records, she was turned to a pillar of salt. Lot’s wife fell under judgment because she loved Sodom most of all.



Another day of judgment, which Jesus compares to the judgment that fell on Sodom, is coming. **Luke 17:31-33**, **“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. Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”**

When Jesus returns, there will not be time for gathering possessions or making side trips. It won’t work to say, *“Just a minute Lord, I need to get my cell phone.”* Or, *“Wait a second Jesus, I have some cash hidden in my freezer I need to bring it along.”* Who are you going to call from heaven? What kind of shopping do you think you will be doing? The things people cling to in this world are all temporary distractions that will have no value when Jesus comes again. We need to be ready to let go of the things of this world, because they are of no value in the world to come.

**Luke 17:22-24**, **“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. Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. 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.”** Don’t be fooled by any talk of Jesus coming back invisibly or of Jesus returning to some place where only certain people can see Him. The Bible makes it clear, when Jesus comes again, it will be sudden and dramatic and everyone will know.

Here in Osaka, we rarely see dramatic lightning storms. But in Missouri, where I grew up, we had massive summer storms with incredible lightning shows. The whole sky would light up with a half a dozen fat bolts of lightning and then a few seconds later the thunder would shake the house. When Jesus returns, everyone will know, no one is going to sleep through it.



By the way, what was the sin of Sodom? Many people think of sexual sin when they think of Sodom, and that was definitely a major problem. But take a look at what **Ezekiel 16:49-50** says, **“Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.”** I think the sexual sin of Sodom is included in the, “detestable things.” But it is arrogance, overeating and lack of concern for the poor that get first mention. In modern society, these things are hardly considered sins at all, but it is a warning to us that the Lord poured out judgment on Sodom for such sins.

What about the time of Noah? **Genesis 6:5**, **“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”** From other verses we know that violence and sexual sin were huge problems before the flood. But what gets prominent mention here is the evil thoughts of the heart. God cares about the heart. Again, in modern society, people hardly even think about heart attitudes when they think about sin. But God cares a lot about heart attitudes. As it says in **1 Samuel 16:7b**, **“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”**

Judgment was poured out, quite literally, with the flood of Noah. And fire rained down on Sodom. But Noah and Lot were saved from destruction. Why? **Genesis 6:9b**, tells us, “**Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.**” And 2 Peter 4:9 tells that Lot was a righteous man. Let’s read that along with the context, **2 Peter 2:4-9**.

**“[4] For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; [5] if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; [6] if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; [7] and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men [8] (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- [9] if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”**

Judgment is certain. And the truth is that we wouldn’t want God to leave sin unpunished, because that would be unjust. Judgment is not our favorite subject, but it is necessary. If people really didn’t want justice, then our cities would have no policemen. But the truth is that when we hear on the news that someone has been murdered, we want the police to catch the murderer. We want justice and the Lord is a just God who will bring justice. But the Lord is also a loving God; He knows how to rescue godly men and women.

In the Old Testament, the Lord counted those who believed His word as righteous. For example, **Genesis 15:6** tells us, “**Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**” Since the time of Jesus, we know that Jesus is Lord, and so saving faith is described as believing in Jesus. But the heart issue is the same as in the Old Testament. Do you believe the Word of God? Are you willing to trust God for your salvation?

God has made a way for all who believe in Jesus to be saved. Jesus explains it very clearly. Take a look at **John 5:24**, “**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.**” That’s pretty clear. But if we had only this one verse, someone might wonder if there were also other ways to be saved apart from Jesus. The answer is no. There is only one way. Jesus makes this very clear in verses like **John 14:6**. “**Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

There is one way and only one way to be saved. The name of, “salvation street,” is Jesus Christ. The revelation of truth is Jesus Christ. The source of life is Jesus Christ. If anyone wants to see Father God, then they have to see Jesus first. Jesus prepared this way of salvation through His death on the cross. This also is mentioned in Luke 17. After Jesus explained that His Second Coming would be dramatic and sudden, like lightning flashing across the sky, Jesus also said, in **Luke 17:25**, “**But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.**”



Jesus died on the cross and was buried, and on the third day He rose again. 1 Corinthians 15:6 records that Jesus showed Himself alive to over 500 people. That means there were over 500 eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus had been dead, but was alive again. And then Jesus returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father until the time comes to return again. When will that be? We don’t know exactly, but in verses like **Matthew 24:14** Jesus gives us some information. “**And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**”

Our Lord loves each person and His heart is for each one to be saved. And our Lord also loves every tribe, tongue, and nation, and He desires that there would be Christians among every people. Some people wonder why it is taking so long for the Lord to come back. But **2 Peter 3:9** tells us, “**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**”

Let's go back and take a second look at the beginning of today's passage. **Luke 17:20-21.** "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, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.'" This Bible translation, the New International Version (NIV) says, "the kingdom of God is within you." For those who believe in Jesus, that is certainly true, because Jesus comes and lives in our heart through His Holy Spirit as soon as we trust in Him. But the Pharisees who asked the question were probably not believers. Some Bibles give a different translation. For example, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) says, "the kingdom of God is in your midst." This translation brings out the fact that King Jesus and His followers, the disciples, are standing right there with the Pharisees.

Either way, Jesus' answer and the examples of Noah and Lot that follow, point to the condition of the heart as the place where the Kingdom of God begins in each person who believes. When we recognize Jesus as King and Lord and submit our will to His perfect will, then the Kingdom of God comes to our heart and we are saved. In **Romans 10:9-10**, Paul puts it this way. "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

When we recognize Jesus as Lord and King and confess our faith in Him, then we are saved. But to call Jesus, "Lord," is more than mere words. If we say Jesus is our Lord, then we need to obey Him. We don't want Jesus to ask us, as He asked in **Luke 6:46**, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Ouch! We don't want to hear that from Jesus. Jesus is Lord. So we need to obey Him, starting by repenting of our sins, turning away from all that is wrong and then living according to His Word. And as we do that, we will be blessed beyond all measure. But I am not talking about being blessed with the things of this world. We live in a fallen world and God doesn't promise us a comfortable life here on earth. The blessing I am talking about is treasure in heaven and peace and joy in our hearts. I am talking about experiencing the love of God in our lives. I am talking about salvation and eternal life.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Apostle Paul was confident in his relationship with Jesus and certain of his salvation. I pray that all of us would turn to Jesus wholeheartedly and come to enjoy that same confidence. Take a look at **2 Timothy 4:18**. Paul writes to Timothy, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Do you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Is Jesus your King? Then say it with me, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Let's pray.

#### **V. Closing Prayer**