October 19th

THE NEW SHOFAR

"Optimism is a wish without warrant; Christian hope is a certainty, guaranteed by God himself. Optimism reflects ignorance as to whether good things will ever actually come. Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life, and every moment beyond it, the believer can say with truth, on the basis of God's own commitment, that the best is yet to come."

The last verse of our text, Luke 18:8, refers to the second coming of Christ: "I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, ***will he find faith on the earth***?"

Being Ready at the Coming of God's Kingdom

In **17:20** the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. They meant: When will Messiah come and overthrow our enemies and establish the throne of David and bring peace and righteousness to the world? Jesus' answer was baffling to people who did not acknowledge him to be the Messiah. He said in effect: *If your only way of recognizing the kingdom of God is by miraculous signs that bring down the Roman tyranny, then you will surely miss it, because the kingdom of God is already* ***in the midst of you*** (**v. 21; 11:20**—it should **not** be translated "within you" because Jesus would not have said that to unbelieving Pharisees). Jesus is the King, and wherever he wins people into allegiance, his reign is established.

Then in **17:22–24** he warns against the opposite mistake. In verse 21 he warned against looking for catastrophic signs and said the kingdom was quietly but powerfully in their midst. But in **verses 23 and 24** he warns against thinking that the final appearance of the Son of man could be anything but catastrophic. It will not be quiet or hidden. If someone says, "Lo, here," or, "Lo, there," then you know they are wrong. "*For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day*" (v. 24). The second coming of Christ will not be a hidden thing which one person sees and then shows to another. It will be obvious to all from horizon to horizon, like a streak of lightning. "*But first*," verse 25 says, "*he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation*."

eternal life hangs on whether we are ready when he comes

Then in **17:26–30** Jesus describes what the days will be like leading up to the coming of the Son of man. He compares the coming of the Son of man to the flood in Noah's day (v. 27) and to the destruction of Sodom by fire and brimstone (v. 29), and he says that the days before Christ's coming will be like the days before those two catastrophes, namely, full of busy, ordinary life. Verse 27: "They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built." Verse 30 says, "So it will be on the day when the Son of man is revealed." In other words, we can expect that most of the world will be engaged in business as usual when the lightning of the Son of man flashes from sky to sky.

Then in verses 31–37 Jesus warns us not to be like Lot's wife (v. 32). That is, in the hour of crisis, don't love the world. Don't turn back with longing, or you'll be unfit for the kingdom (9:61). Remember, when the Son of man comes, he will separate the sheep and the goats, even if they are sleeping together or working side by side at the mill. One will be taken into safety, the other left. "Left where?" the disciples ask. "Where the body is, there will the vultures be gathered together" (v. 37). Not to be gathered to Christ at his coming is to be left for destruction. *Jesus makes it clear that eternal life hangs on whether we are ready when he comes.*

Growing Cold in the Last Days

Now we can see that **Luke 18:1–8 is** really part of this end-time teaching. It closes in verse 8 with the question, "*When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"* Will the warnings of Jesus to remember Lot's wife, to keep the heart fixed on Christ, and to not love the world—will these warnings secure the faith of the disciples? Will they endure to the end? Will the Son of man find us trusting him, or busy securing our lives in this world?

I think a natural question the disciples would ask (and which we should ask) is: **How can we endure to the end**? How can we make sure that we don't become like Lot's wife, too much in love with this world to go all the way with Christ? How can we resist the relentless temptations of Sodom to be desensitized to God's kingdom by the ordinary pressures of daily life? Did you notice back in verse 28 that Jesus doesn't mention sodomy in the list of what characterized Sodom just before its destruction? In fact, he doesn't mention anything in itself sinful: "*they ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, built*." Judgment didn't come upon Sodom merely because it had practicing homosexuals in it, but also because all the good, ordinary activities of life were godless. *The good things in life can make us just as insensitive to the reality of God as the gross things in life can.* So the disciples of Jesus are left in the middle of a tremendous battle, which most people don't even know is going on: the battle to maintain radical, heartfelt, self-denying faith in Christ not only in the threat of persecution and sinful temptations, but also in the threat of ordinary home life and business life which can blunt all our sensitivity to God's eternal kingdom.

Pray! Pray! Pray!

The danger we face as disciples of Jesus waiting for his return is stressed even more clearly by **Matthew 24:11–13.** Jesus says concerning the last days before his coming: "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, *most men's love will grow cold*. But *he who endures* to the end will be saved." So in **Luke 18:8** Jesus could have asked, "When the Son of man comes, will he find fervent love on earth?" The danger we face is that our faith in Christ and our love for him and for each other will be swallowed up by opposition or by the sheer ordinariness of daily life. So the question is: How can we endure? How can we be found with faith and love? How can we avoid being like Lot's wife?

So Jesus tells a parable to give the answer. And it is one of the few parables which he interprets for us lest we miss the point. **Luke 18:1** tells us the point of the parable: "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." Jesus' answer to the question how to endure to the end is, Pray! Pray! Pray! And don't grow weary of praying.