

Luke 17:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

Analysis

In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Jesus shifts from historical parallels to practical commands for **that day** (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, en ekeinē tē hēmera)—the day of Son of Man's revelation (v. 30). The imagery: someone on **the housetop** (ἐπὶ τοῦ δώματος, epi tou dōmatos)—Palestinian houses had flat roofs accessed by external stairs, used for work, rest, or prayer. **His stuff in the house** (τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ, ta skeuē autou en tē oikia) refers to possessions, goods, belongings.

The command: **let him not come down to take it away** (μὴ καταβάτω ἄραι αὐτά, mē katabatō arai auta)—don't descend to retrieve possessions. Likewise, **he that is in the field, let him not return back** (ὁ ἐν ἀγρῷ μὴ ἐπιστρεψάτω εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω, ho en agrō mē epistrepsatō eis ta opisō)—the field worker must not go back for anything. The urgency is absolute: flee immediately, abandon possessions, don't look back. Why? Because judgment falls suddenly, completely, like Sodom's fire—any delay is fatal.

This has dual application:

1. **Historical**—Jerusalem's AD 70 destruction required immediate flight (Luke 21:20-22); Jesus' warning saved Christians who fled to Pella before Rome's siege.

2. **Eschatological**—at Christ's return, no time exists for securing earthly goods.

The command tests priorities: Will you value possessions over life? Will attachment to this world delay obedience? The warning: earthly goods become worthless in judgment. Better to lose everything temporal and gain everything eternal than cling to perishing treasures.

Historical Context

Palestinian culture would understand this imagery immediately. Flat roofs served multiple purposes—sleeping in hot weather, drying figs, prayer (Acts 10:9). External stairs allowed roof access without entering the house. Someone on the roof could flee immediately by descending the external stairs and running, or could waste precious time entering the house to gather belongings. Field workers similarly faced the choice: flee immediately or return home for possessions and family.

Luke 21:20-22 applies this specifically to Jerusalem's coming destruction: 'When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies...let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains.' Church tradition records that Christians heeded this warning—when Roman armies under Cestius Gallus briefly withdrew in AD 66, Jerusalem's Christians fled to Pella in Perea. When Titus returned in AD 70 for final siege, believers had escaped. Those who remained—including Jews who ignored warnings—perished. Josephus records over 1 million Jews died in the siege; survivors were enslaved. Jesus' warning saved those who valued His words over their possessions. The lesson applies to final judgment: obey immediately, value Christ over everything, don't let earthly attachments cause fatal delay.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What possessions or earthly attachments might you be tempted to 'go back for' if Christ returned today?
2. How does Jesus' command to flee without taking possessions reveal the relative worthlessness of earthly goods in light of eternity?
3. What does it mean practically to hold earthly goods 'loosely,' ready to abandon them instantly at Christ's call?

Interlinear Text

ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ὃς ἔσται ἐπὶ τοῦ δώματος
In that G3588 **day** G2250 **he which** G3739 **shall be** G2071 **upon** G1909 G3588 **the housetop** G1430
G1722 G1565

καὶ τὰ σκεύη αὐτὰ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ μὴ καταβάτω
and G3588 **stuff** G4632 **his** G846 **In** G1722 G3588 **the house** G3614 **him not** G3361 **come down** G2597
G2532

ἄραι αὐτὰ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ ὁμοίως μὴ
away G142 **his** G846 **and** G2532 G3588 **In** G1722 G3588 **the field** G68 **likewise** G3668 **him not** G3361

ἐπιστρεψάτω εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω
let him G1994 **back** G1519 G3588 G3694

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 45:5 (Parallel theme): And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.

Luke 21:21 (Parallel theme): Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

