

Coming of Jesus Christ

by G.B. Duncan

G.B. Duncan's sermon emphasizes the parallels between the days of Noah and Lot and the conditions preceding Christ's second coming, highlighting God's judgment and mercy.

Duration: 27:21

Scripture: Luke 17:26

Topics: "Second Coming"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the finality of separation that will occur on the day of God's final action. He emphasizes that this event will happen suddenly and without any opportunity for repentance or change of mind. The preacher references Dr. Graham Strage, a Baptist minister who received recognition for his ministry, and quotes Dr. Kepler, an astronomer, to highlight the dramatic nature of this event. The preacher then focuses on the comparison between the days of Noah and the days of Lot, highlighting the undeniable wickedness and guilt of humanity during those times.

Transcript

And now, dear Lord, we turn to thy written word in utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit, praying thee that in thy mercy and grace he may be our teacher and guide, taking our minds and thinking through them thy thoughts, taking my lips and speaking through them thine own word, taking all our hearts and inclining them in obedience to thy perfect will. And this we ask for Christ our Saviour's sake. Amen.

I want to look with you at the passage we read together from St. Luke's Gospel, chapter 17, and taking as our key thought phrases out of verses 26 and 28, when our Lord says concerning his second coming, as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. And then in verse 28, likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, verse 30, even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. Two statements covering similar incidents, and our Lord says so shall it be.

This Sunday is Advent Sunday, and therefore it's the first Sunday in the Christian calendar. I wonder how many of us know that the Christian church has its calendar just as the civic state. In our ordinary life, our year begins in January.

In the Christian calendar, the year begins on Advent Sunday. And this is the Sunday when, of course, our whole Christian faith really begins, because we think of Christ as the coming one, the one who has come in his humility and incarnation to redeem, the one who still comes into every life that's open to receive him,

but the one who also shall come and thus complete the revelation of the purposes and the power of God. I wonder how often some of us who glory in the gospel, somehow or other feel that it's not entirely adequate to cover the tremendous need of the world today.

The salvation of the individual soul seems a very tiny thing, although it's not, and of course it has many, many ramifications and repercussions, but the salvation of the individual is not the total picture. The cross is not all that God has to show to man. Sometimes we hear people say, why doesn't God do something to tidy up the mess in the world, and it's a complaint that is justifiable.

If God is love, if God is all-powerful, why doesn't he intervene? Well, the answer, of course, is that he has intervened. He is continually intervening, but one day he will decisively and finally intervene again. In the collect that is prayed in the Anglican Church all over the world on the first Sunday in Advent, reference is made to the two comings of Christ, to his coming in humility and to his coming again in glorious majesty.

This has been part of the Catholic or universal faith of the Christian Church. Wherever there's something genuine, you'll get the counterfeit and you'll get those who have the most peculiar ideas about the second coming, but this doesn't alter the fact that he is coming. And I wonder if I may just to look at this one passage, there are so many facets it's impossible to cover them all in the course of just a brief morning meditation, but this particular passage is one when our Lord is dealing just in simple language with certain facets that will characterize his second coming.

Right at the beginning of the passage, verse 20, the Pharisees are asking about when the kingdom of God should come, and it may be that our Lord is dealing with the coming of the King in his incarnation. But then at verse 22, he quite specifically moves on to deal with his second coming. He says the days will come when you will long to see one of or maybe the first of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.

And right on then, his theme is quite simply this, as it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. Professor William Barclay introduces his study on this, which is not too enlightening, as a very difficult passage. And it's not entirely easy to dogmatize, but three things seem to me to be clear, and they are enough for us to be going on.

First of all, if the days of our Lord's second return are to correspond to the days of Noah and the days of Lot, then we can note first of all the wickedness that had perverted the judgment of God. The days of Noah, the days of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, one thing was quite clear, the guilt of man was undeniable. In both cases, God found himself faced with a situation when sin had become both flagrant and foul.

In Genesis 6, 5, we read, God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. So it was before the flood. In Genesis 18, 20, we read that the angels, the Lord said, behold, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous.

In both cases, a situation of appalling corruption and degradation had set in, and our Lord says, quite simply, as it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be. We used to be asked sometimes a question that seemingly today isn't worth asking, and the question was, is the world getting better? I haven't heard of that question being asked for a long time, because the whole evidence goes to suggest that it's not getting better, it's getting worse. And of course, in the parable of the tares and the wheat, our Lord said that this was exactly what would happen.

You remember how the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat? And the servants came and said, shall we take out the tares? And the Lord of the harvest said, no, let both grow together. Let both grow together. So apparently there was to be growth in the evil of man, as well as growth in the quality of the believer.

A little while ago, some theologians were so bold as to suggest that men were becoming like gods. You don't hear much talk about that in the area of theology today. Men are not becoming like gods, they're becoming like beasts.

We're seeing more and more how foul and how degrading and how rotten human nature is. The guilt of man, undeniable. The other thing that marked the wickedness that had provoked the judgment of God was not only that the guilt of man was undeniable, but the grace of God was unacceptable.

In both cases, although judgment was determined by God, mercy was offered alongside. And we never want to speak of one without the other. In the days of Noah, the ark was provided.

At the time of Lot in Sodom, the angels came bringing the message, telling the people to leave the city. And let us never, when we speak of the judgments of God, fail to note that mercy goes hand in hand with judgment. No man need perish.

I always say God never sends a man to hell. I don't believe he does. I believe if a man wants to go, not even the love of God can stop him.

And the fact that men go to hell is not a denial of the love of God, it's a demonstration of the rebellion of man. Sometimes happens in the life of a family that maybe a son or a daughter is wanting to make a marriage that is quite unsuitable. The parents with deeper wisdom know that it's not going to lead to happiness, it's going to lead to misery, and they can do everything they can in reasoning, in pleading, in praying, they can do everything that love can do.

But they still don't persuade. And when that girl or that fellow goes off into that marriage, which is going to lead to misery, it's not a denial of the love of the parents at all. It's a demonstration of the foolishness of the one concerned.

So you never find that God's judgment stands alone. It always has alongside it God's mercy. And in Genesis 6, 6 we read, it repented the Lord that he had made man, and it grieved him at his heart.

And Dr. S.E. Gordon commenting on that word grief says that's a love word. It's only love that grieves. Nothing else grieves, but love always does.

In the case of Sodom, in answer to the prayer of Abram, do you remember how Abram had prayed and prayed and prayed that God would spare? And Abram put it to the Lord and said, if there are 50 just and righteous people, will you spare the city? And God said, all right, yes, if there are 50. And then Abram brought the numbers down. If there's 45, if there's 40, if there's 30, if there's 20, if there's 10.

And God agreed to every suggestion, but it was of no avail. And so here in this very chapter, before coming on to the coming of our Lord in judgment, in verse 25, the Lord says, but first must he suffer many things and be rejected. You never get God's judgment without God's mercy, never.

And if man chooses God's judgment, then that's man's own choice, it's not God's. The judgment there is. The wickedness that had provoked the judgment of God.

In both cases, sin had become both flagrant and foul. The second thing that we can note here is the faithfulness that had marked out the servants of God. The faithfulness that had marked out the servants of God.

We thought of the wickedness that had brought out and provoked the judgment of God. And now the faithfulness that had marked out the servants of God. And this could be seen in two ways.

First of all, the righteousness of their lives. Noah is described in Genesis 6, 9, as a just man and perfect in his generation, a man who walked with God. In 2 Peter 2, 5, he's called a preacher of righteousness.

And both by life and by lip, this man stood up for righteousness and stood up in a way that made him stand out from all the wickedness that surrounded him. In 2 Peter 2, verse 8, Lot is described as that righteous man. We often condemn Lot.

And he was to be condemned for the foolishness of his choice. Do you remember how Lot and Abraham had to part? And Abraham, in his gracious way, gave Lot the first choice. And Lot looked on the plain and saw the plain was very fertile and Sodom and Gomorrah were there.

He knew about them, but he chose to take the risk. It was a foolish choice, and we still talk about Lot's choice as being proverbial, of the foolishness of a man who will choose material prosperity and endanger his own soul. That's what Lot did.

But their righteousness was displayed in the obedience they gave to God's word when the message of grace and judgment came. When God told Noah what was going to happen, that he was going to destroy the world, the man that he had created. He told Noah the way of escape that he wanted provided, and Noah built and then entered the ark.

Lot obeyed when the message came, and he left Sodom. And the righteousness of these men is not only shown in the way they lived, but the way they reacted to the word of God when it came to them. And of course, this is precisely the situation that we have today.

We have the tares and we have the wheat. But there is another feature that marked the faithfulness of the servants of God, and that was not only the righteousness of their lives, but the restlessness in their hearts. We see this especially in the case of Lot.

And here again he shows up in a good light. In 2 Peter 2 7 we read that Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.

Lot in his folly had made his home in Sodom, but he was never at home there. He made his home there, but he wasn't at home. And I'm sure he regretted it to his dying day, especially when he saw how his family suffered.

But he himself maintained his loyalty. But there was a restlessness all the time, an unhappiness, an uneasiness, a wishing that something could happen to change it all. And in Luke 17 we are given an indication in which that restlessness can still be expressed.

In verse 22, our Lord said to his disciples, The day will come when you will long to see Christ coming again, a longing for his coming. I wonder whether you feel sometimes that if you are the Almighty you just say curtains to the whole rotten show and shut it all down. Men may mock, as recorded in 2 Peter 3 4, saying where is the promise of his coming.

But the Christian's faith rests in God's word that the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness. But his long-suffering to us were not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. A restlessness in their hearts as well as a righteousness in their lives.

I wonder whether that restlessness is yours. I wonder whether sometimes you wish with all your heart that Christ would come again. The men would see the majesty, the glory, the omnipotence, the almightiness of God.

See the revelation of God in Christ was only partial. It was adequate for faith, but only partial, not complete. And Christ said, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

It didn't mean we'd seen everything. We hadn't seen the glory. We hadn't seen the majesty.

We hadn't seen the splendor that whenever men did get a glimpse of it, they fell on their faces as men did. We didn't see that. He came in humility for one purpose, to say, the next time he's coming in majesty for another purpose, to judge.

And then the picture will be completed. And I believe that if I can put it reverently, God owes it to Jesus Christ that he should come again in majesty. You see, God isn't somebody that you can spit on.

God isn't somebody that man can take and flog. God isn't somebody that man can take because of his envy and jealousy and fear and cowardice and nail to a cross. You can't do that with God and get away with it.

No, there's going to be a completing of the picture, a filling out of the detail. And the good book tells us that when men see him as he is in his majesty, they'll cry out in agony. And every mouth then will be stopped.

I think that tremendous word in Philippians 2 ties in with the second coming, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Men aren't prepared to do it now. Maybe there's somebody here, you're not prepared to do it now.

All I can say, you're going to do it one day. If you're not prepared to bow the knee to Jesus Christ and call him Lord now, you will one day. You won't have an option then.

You will do it. You will be on your knees. You will name him Lord.

You'll have to. And so some of us long for that day. We long for it more than anything else.

And so there is not only a righteousness in the lives of the servants of God, but a restlessness in their hearts. They long for the day of the Son of Man. But our Lord says you're not seeing it yet.

So we've got two things that certainly seem to be clear. First of all, that concerning that time, that it will be the wickedness seen just as it was seen then. The wickedness that had provoked the judgment of God.

Running parallel with that, shining like lights in a dark place, there will be the faithfulness that had marked out the servants of God. And then there's one other thing which emerges quite clearly, and that is the suddenness that had brought in the action of God. Suddenly the flood came.

Suddenly the fire fell. Suddenly the Lord comes. So we're told in Luke 17, 24, as the lightning that lighteneth out of one part unto heaven, shineth unto the other part unto heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in his day.

And this happens, it's going to happen as this, we're told in another passage in scripture, in the twinkling of an eye. It's going to be the most dramatic happening in the whole of human history, and it will terminate human history as such. History will end then, and eternity will begin.

Two thoughts here concerning this swift and sudden and dramatic event when God intervenes again in human history. First of all, the futility of trying to find out when he will come. Our Lord makes this plain.

Verse 22, 23, he said unto the disciples, the days will come when ye shall desire to see the first of the days of the Son of Man, ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, see here or see there, go not after them nor follow them. It's understandable that we want to know when he's coming, but it's quite unbiblical to say when.

One of the last things our Lord said in Acts 1, 7, when he was saying farewell to the church, and they asked in their misunderstanding of his ways and purposes, wilt thou at this time again restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father put in his own power. And nothing is clearer from scripture than that the time of our Lord's second coming can never be known. No man knows.

So often people have been foolish enough and unbiblical enough to do the other. They've tried to work out when he's coming. Well our Lord just says, don't be foolish, don't follow them, don't listen to them.

I have on my bookshelves books about the second coming of Christ, and they make a little bit pathetic reading. And I look back to books written by well-meaning good evangelical Christians, written away back in the 20s maybe. You find that the date that they've been foolish enough to fix for the second coming of Christ has come and gone, and nothing's happened.

That may be understandable, but it's totally unbiblical. The futility of trying to find out when he will come, and then the finality of what will happen when he does come. What is the finality? It's the finality of separation.

I tell you in that night there shall be two, and there is no men in the Greek. There shall be two in one bed, the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women, there's no women in the Greek.

Two shall be grinding together, the one shall be taken and the other left. Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left. The finality of separation.

What is this separation? Well it's a separation chosen by man, not by God. Let's get a hold of that. It's a separation that men have chosen and then God confirms.

Those who want nothing to do with him will have nothing to do with him. Those who want to be with him will be with him. See the great fact about sin is that it separates.

This is what the good book says, this is what we know in life, it separates man from man, separates man from God. The prophet Isaiah says your iniquities have separated between you and your God. It happened right at the very beginning, in the very first sin, in the garden of Eden, when man first sinned.

When they heard the voice of the Lord calling in the cool of the day in the garden, they went and hid themselves. What had happened? Something had come between. Before there'd been openness, now there was hiddenness.

It's been happening ever since. Man is born a sinner, he's born out of fellowship with God. It will happen finally when Christ comes to judge.

There will be those shut in, there will be those shut out. The whole story, the whole teaching of the whole of the New Testament indicates that there's a finality coming, and the finality is the finality of separation. The tares and the wheat separated, the sheep and the goats separated, the fisherman's net, the good and the bad separated.

The wise and foolish virgins, the wise in, the foolish out. And the whole whole structure of God indicates that there's going to come a day when there's going to be finality. The finality is the judgment of God which will set its seal on the judgment of man.

A man has chosen not to have Christ and he doesn't have it. A man has chosen to have Christ and he has it. And all that's going to happen on the judgment day is God will clinch your choice.

You can't blame God for that. No man can turn around and say, what are you doing this for? He's not doing it at all. You're doing it.

You've done it. God just says, right, that's your choice, that's what it is. So two in the bed, one taken the other left.

Two in the field, one taken the other left. Two at the mill, one taken the other left. The finality of separation.

The day of God's final action will come and it will come suddenly. Be no time then to change your mind. No time then to say, I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

No time at all. It's going to happen in a flash. Dr. Graham Scoggy, the great Baptist preacher who exercised such an incredible ministry at Charlotte Chapel, so outstanding was it that the University of Edinburgh gave him a doctorate and he was made DD and it's not often that the University of Edinburgh would do that to a Baptist minister.

It's just a testimony to the quality of his ministry. He has a book called The Lord's Return and in that he quotes the experience of Dr. Kepler, the astronomer. Dr. Scoggy writes that Dr. Kepler, the astronomer, resolved to discover the law of planetary motion and for eight years he toiled making numbers of successive experiments but without any success.

He made 19 experiments in all. Before abandoning the effort he decided to try one more and his 20th hypothesis was that the stellar world move not in a circle around a center but they move in an ellipse around two foci and when he put that key into the heavens it yielded to him the secret which had so long been hidden. Bursting with excitement he threw up his arms and cried, O almighty God, I am thinking thy thoughts after thee.

Dr. Scoggy adds, as to God's plan in human history, great confusion in the minds of multitudes has resulted from assuming that God's plan moves in a circle around the center of the incarnation whereas in fact it moves in an ellipse around the foci of the first and second comings of Christ. As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, even so shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. The wickedness that had provoked the judgment of God, the faithfulness that had marked out the servants of God, the suddenness that had brought in the action of God and one day he will come.

I think that's one of the most wonderful hopes that we have which has set our feet dancing, which has set our hearts singing.

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