

# Luke 12

by John Nelson Darby

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*In Luke 12, John Nelson Darby emphasizes the call for disciples to live faithfully and fearlessly in light of God's truth amidst worldly opposition and hypocrisy.*

**Scripture:** Luke 12:1-8, Luke 12:22-49, Luke 12:54-57

**Topics:** "Faithfulness", "Watchfulness"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of the Word of God and prayer as essential means of blessing for the soul amidst a world that rejects the Messiah. He warns the disciples about the dangers of hypocrisy and the necessity of living in the light, while preparing them for the hostility they will face. The sermon highlights the importance of fearing God over man, the need for confession of Christ, and the assurance of God's care for His followers. Darby also discusses the call to seek the kingdom of God and the eternal treasures that await those who remain faithful. Ultimately, he stresses the urgency of being watchful for the Lord's return and the consequences of neglecting this call.

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## Transcript

The last section of this gospel (chap. 10:38; 11) shewed the two great means of blessing to the soul - namely the word of God and prayer, the precious gift of God, and the true need of man in the presence of a rejected Messiah. It shewed withal the doom of the people who refused every testimony of God. Chapter 12 presents the disciples carrying on their testimony in the midst of hypocrisy and opposition, but in the power of the Holy Ghost. The Lord addressed His disciples first of all; but fearlessly, and without compromise, before a vast throng, as one who acted in the spirit of what He taught. He warns them against that religious formalism which consists of what could be presented to man, and insists strongly and explicitly upon the sure bringing of all things into the light (v. 1-3).

But just as the breaking down of forms and the revelation of the full light of God had its highest operation and effect in His own death, so the disciples must look for the world's hostility, must be prepared for it in their own case, it might be up to death itself. If Messiah were rejected and slain, what could they look for in the same scene, while Satan's power is not set aside? Hence, also, in these chapters it is a question of the soul's relationship with God. It was not the unfolding of the church yet, but the kingdom in its Jewish application is set aside, and the consequence is that the disciples are to look for the Lord's coming again, and until then, trial and violence. His return would have two aspects: one for such as are in relationship with Himself, and the other for the world; and both are taken up here. They were to beware of hypocrisy,

and to remember God's necessary determination to bring everything to light. "For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."

121 Verses 4, 5. Next, as to the importance of walking in the light. They were not to fear them who kill the body but God, who could cast into hell. Jesus perfectly feared God, and called on His friends to fear none but Him. "Yea, I say unto you, fear him." But further (v. 6-8), not even a sparrow is forgotten before God; and the very hairs of their head were all numbered. Therefore they were not to fear. Our God has made it of faith to be assured that He cares much for us.

On the other hand, they were not to trust in themselves - in their own courage or their own wisdom, but to confess Christ. There was the result in relation with the humbled, but yet to be exalted, Son of man. There would be a return of love or shame before the angels of God, according as He should be confessed or denied before men (v. 8, 9). He had hidden His glory to effect grace. He had come among men and into the midst of evil, that God might be fully glorified in His humiliation. This was the patience of God, for Christ claimed nothing. But the Holy Ghost would come asserting the glory of God, and claiming subjection to it, witnessing the grace, and proving the glory in power. Hence a word spoken against the Holy Ghost would not be forgiven. Wonderful to say, this is attached to the disciples (v. 10) to console and strengthen them in their weakness. The Son of man might be slighted, and yet there was forgiveness; but if He by whom they would speak was blasphemed, it would be unpardonable. Further (v. 11, 12), the Holy Ghost would speak by them, whatever the power, ecclesiastical or civil, that arraigned them. Such were the principles, the warnings, the motives. and the encouragements the Lord attached to a mission which, rejected by and outside Judaism, was the introduction of light by grace into a world of sin and darkness.

122 Thereupon in verses 13, 14, the Lord, by positively refusing to adjudge in Israel, shews that Jewish blessing had lost its place. It was no longer a question of dividing the inheritance, but of the soul in its position before God. Only He warns against the folly of loving the things which gave occasion to such disputes. Righteousness on earth is not looked for now: Jesus declines the place of regulating it, and proceeds to shew the inward principle of the kingdom in contrast with the world. Hence He told the multitude to beware of covetousness, for a man's life is not in what he possesses, adding a most solemn parable as to the doom of the rich man, who was not rich toward God. Whatever he might say to his soul, God required it that night. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself" (v. 16-21).

Verses 22-31. If it be thus with the world, do you who have a father, even the Father, not be anxious for your soul or body. Food and clothing were not just objects for disciples' care, but rather to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Their thoughts should be in another channel, rising above a mere natural view of the life and the body. But He proceeds to assign positive grounds operative upon them as believers. Needful things were subsidiary which God provided, for they were His and under His ordering. He cared for much less than they were. The fowls of heaven and the grass of the field read them no un instructive lesson, as interpreted of Christ. And if there was, on the one side, God's provident care for the least of His creatures, on the other side let them bear in mind the utter weakness of their anxieties. Whatever might be natural to those who knew not God, they were not to be seeking what to eat or drink: their Father knew they wanted such things. Let them seek the kingdom of God, and all the rest should be added.

Verses 32-40. The Lord now takes higher ground for them. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Therefore were they rather to get rid of what they had as men, and to

provide things such as the Father gives to the heirs of the kingdom. They were to act the part of kings called to and having an higher inheritance. The heart follows the treasure. Let them provide a treasure in the heavens, and their heart will be there also. To be great saints is not by the value of what they gave meritoriously, but the effect internally suitable to their position and their calling. God is not ashamed to be called their God. Further (v. 35, etc.), they were to wait for their Lord. This was especially to form their character, and to be continually and outwardly expressed - the habitual expectancy of the Lord. Their loins were girded, and their lights burning, as if Christ was actually on His way. And He that shall come will come; and "blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

123 They were now associated with the heavenly character of the kingdom. This world was nought; what they had of it they could turn into the privilege of doing good unselfishly, and have their treasure above, where there would be no losing it, and so their hearts would be kept there. Thus their character would be heavenly. Meanwhile they were to be as men who waited their Lord returning from the wedding. The general aim of the heavenly effect of the calling is here in question. They were to be on the watch. It is not prophecy, but character and position. There are no signs or historical circumstances, as in chapters 17 and 21, for people on earth; here there is heavenly separation from it. For those who thus wait Jesus is still a servant. He will make them sit down to meat, and come forth and serve them. Girded to serve as man, His ear bored in death, in joy He comes forth delighting in disciples so walking. Gladly He releases them from their endurance and watching and service; He sets them at the feast, and honours their faithfulness thus. They were therefore left in uncertainty; and so the church, when formed, was left. The church is always to wait for Christ, having no special time: every moment is its time in desire and duty, as alas! it is the world's for negligence. The Jews have a time; days, years, and earth computations belong to them, and therefore signs. To us it may be second watch or third watch; blessed only if we are found watching!

Verses 41-48. Peter puts the question of the application of what goes before, which brings out the portion of those who serve faithfully. They will be set over all the Lord's goods when He returns to take possession of all He made and will inherit; a very encouraging thought, though not the highest. On the other hand Christendom apostatises by putting off in heart the Lord's coming. The great stay of heavenly-mindedness is lost thereby, and so our peculiar calling and hope. To expect the Lord detaches from the world; putting it off left the servant to his own will. It is not doctrinal denial; but he says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming"; and then he acts with violence towards the fellow-servants, and his fellowship is with the world. But that servant has a Lord, let him act ever so independently; and He will come when not expected, and set that servant's portion with the unbelievers, whatever may have been his boasted rights and privileges. Further in detail there would be a righteous adjudgment (v. 47, 48); for here we have the principles of service, as before of position. The ignorance of heathenism, etc., will not be spared, but far more tremendous will be the doom of Christendom. Most righteous, but oh, how solemn!

124 Verse 49. There is another thing to be noted - the import of our Lord's coming then into the world. Had man been what he ought, peace would have been the result; but man saw no beauty in Christ to desire Him, and the effect was hatred - not peace, but a sword. The nearer the relation, the deeper the grievance. The will of man comes out, and is utterly opposed to God. They would not endure to be told that they were under God's judgment. But there is this peculiarity in the character of division which the entrance of grace makes. He who is converted in a family becomes generally, and at once, the slave of the rest. Nature even is subverted in such cases. How often thus a husband or parent loses his authority!

There is a fire kindled before Christ comes again in judgment to kindle it. He was not then come to judge, but they, by their rejection of Him, kindled the fire of judgment.

Now look at the Lord's part. "I have a baptism," etc What could straiten the Lord's heart? The perfect infinite love of God in Him was, as it were, shut up. If He spoke to His disciples of His death, "That be far from thee, Lord" was all the response He met with even in Peter. How painfully was He thus shut up into Himself! But on He went in His service of living love through the world, looking forward to the baptism of His death; and His being straitened shewed the fulness and strength of His love. Till then there could be no letting out of heart; for who understood Him? The Jews said, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" They were shut up within the walls of Judaism; so that, though One was there with a flowing river of blessing, they would not receive Him. Divine love was, we may say, pent up and driven back into the heart of God. But all is met. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished?" He is not straitened now. The barrier is broken in His death.

125 How could they as sinners have communion with Christ? There could be none. When He came to meet man's need, they hated and rejected Him. But on the cross He has put away sin, and now grace can flow out without hindrance or measure: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Man is not changed, but God can act in His own way through redemption. Christ's love and glory did come out in a measure before, for "He could not be hid." But at the cross all overflowed; and looking back from that over His life, we see what infinite love, and sorrow, and suffering, filled it up.

In verses 54-57 the multitude are addressed on the principle of personal responsibility - first, upon the evident signs of God's dealing with the world, and next, from their moral judgment of what was right. The conclusion was, that God was in the way with the Jewish people; and if they did not agree with Him then, they would turn Him into a judge, and must incur the full penalty of their iniquities. In human affairs man would be prudent enough to come to terms with his adversary, knowing himself wrong and anticipating the judgment. If they did not submit and be reconciled to the Lord now in the way, they would soon be delivered to His judicial dealings and not cease from them till they had received of His hand double for all their sins.

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