

Luke 18

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, prayer, and lowliness in the kingdom of God, and highlights the death and resurrection of Christ as the only means of a holy salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Luke 18, Romans 10:17

Topics: "Faith", "Prayer"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Luke 18, emphasizing that the kingdom of God is presented through faith in Jesus rather than outward appearances. He highlights the importance of persistent prayer, especially for the righteous facing oppression, and contrasts the self-righteousness of the Pharisee with the humility of the publican, who seeks God's mercy. Darby illustrates that true goodness comes from God alone, and that human efforts are insufficient for salvation. He also discusses the necessity of Christ's death for redemption and the hope of resurrection, culminating in the call for faith amidst trials. The sermon concludes with the example of a blind man who, despite opposition, demonstrates unwavering faith in Jesus as the Son of David.

Transcript

We saw, from verse 20 to the end of the last chapter, that the kingdom of God was presented, first, in the person of Jesus, as a question of faith, not of outward show, nor of a Lo, here! or lo, there! and, secondly, in the way of judgment, which should deliver the remnant by the execution of divine vengeance on their enemies.

155 Verses 1-8. The first eight verses of our chapter complete the prophetic warning, and shew that the resource of the righteous in the last days will be prayer. Nevertheless, though the parable has the special application to the future oppression of God's witnesses who will then be found in Jerusalem, the instruction, as usual with this gospel, is made general so as to suit any or all kinds of difficulty by which men might be tried. "And he speaks a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." Faith would be put to the test. If God were looked to, and not merely the blessing, men would not faint, though there was no answer. They would go on, always looking up, though all seemed against them. The widow represents those who have no human resource: their resource would be constancy in prayer. Such will be the godly seed in Israel, for it is the remnant, not the church which is here meant. They will plead with the judge to avenge them of their adversary. Their patience and confidence may be sorely tried, but they will not cry in vain. "And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not

God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him." He may be slow in taking up their cause; but when once He shall rise up, a short work will He make on the earth. Meanwhile, patience must have its perfect work. In Jesus it had its full perfection. There was the rejection and the reproach of men, the forsaking of disciples, the power of Satan, the cup of God's wrath; but He went through all to the glory of God. In detail, we too have to be sifted, and to find all circumstances against us but God for us, yet more than if we had outward help, miraculous power, the church all right, etc. Even joy may hinder our entire dependence on God, making us forget, practically, that the flesh profits nothing. When no circumstances lead you to have any hope, is your hope then in Him? The flesh may get on for a long while, as in Saul; but faith only can wait with all against it. It is then the divine life depending on divine power. Thus it was in Christ pre-eminently. "I believed, therefore have I spoken." He went down into the dust of death, and has introduced a wholly new order of things. And we, having the same spirit of faith - we also believe, and therefore speak. "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." Christ is dead, risen, and now set down at the right hand of God. Having this life, we are put to the test practically to learn the lesson of death and resurrection, where nothing but God can sustain.

156 In the parable there are two considerations. If the unjust judge hear and act for the defenceless, be the motive what it may, will not God? But this is far from all. God has His affections, not only His character, but objects of His delight. "And shall not God avenge his own elect?" etc. It never can become the righteous God, who taketh vengeance to make light of evil or let the wicked go unpunished. For then how shall He judge the world? He notices the cry from the oppressed day and night, and it is the cry of His own elect. "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." But will there be the faith that expects His interference? They will cry from distress and God will hear. Nevertheless, the question is raised, Will there be, when the Son of man cometh, that faith on the earth, which is founded on God known in peaceful communion? Will it not rather be the cry of the righteous, in bitterness of spirit, a cry forced out of them, and not the cry of desire?

Verse 9. We have next, the moral features of, and suited to, the kingdom, the characters which are in harmony or discord with the state of things introduced by grace. The Pharisee and publican set forth, not the doctrine of atonement or of justification by faith, but the certainty that self-righteousness is displeasing to God, and that lowliness because of our sin is most acceptable in His sight. The Pharisee does not set God aside. He "stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee." But then he thanks God for what he is, not for what God is. The only hope of the publican was in God Himself. He was very ignorant, no doubt, but he had the right spirit to get at God. Light had broken in and shewn he was a sinner, and he submitted to the painful conviction, and confessed the truth of his state to God. He was cast on God's mercy to his soul. He dared not appeal to justice, he did not ask indifference, but that mercy which measures the sin and forgives it. The revelation of grace had not yet come in, the work of reconciliation was not yet done, so that the publican stood "afar off," but his heart was touched, and God was what he wanted. If a soul is brought to a sense of sin now, it need not, and ought not, to stand afar off. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. Nevertheless, though he did and could not thus know grace, the publican gives God and himself their true character. It was not full knowledge, but the knowledge, as far as it went was true. "I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Universal truth! but where so shewn as in Jesus? For if the first man, exalting himself, was abased to hell, He who was God, made Himself of no reputation, humbled Himself to the death of the cross. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him," etc.

157 In one sense men cannot humble themselves, because they are sinners already, and cannot go lower; a saint may. True humility is forgetfulness of self.

This is illustrated yet more by the incident that follows (v. 15-17), where they brought infants to Jesus, that He would touch them. It is the lowliness of real insignificance, as the former was because of sinfulness. Who would be troubled with beings of such little consequence? Not the disciples, but Jesus. The Lord delighted in them, and that is the spirit of the kingdom of God. And here too a general moral maxim comes out. If a man is to enter that kingdom, all confidence in self must be broken down, and the truth be received simply, as a little child hears its mother. If it is not so, God and man have not their place. When He speaks, all I have to do is to listen. This is the humility of nothingness, as the other was on account of sin.

Next, in verses 18 to 27 comes the question of doing in order to eternal life, not salvation for a lost one, but that which searches the heart to the bottom. The young man was a lovely character, looked at as a creature. For if there are the ravages of sin in the world, there are traces of God there too. This ruler did not see God in Christ. Morally attracted, he came to learn to do good, without a doubt of his own competence. In Jesus he only saw a perfectly good man, and one therefore eminently able to advise and direct him in the same path. Sin, on the one hand, and grace, on the other, were altogether ignored by him. He knew neither himself nor God. There is no man good. All are gone astray. Man is a sinner, and needs God to be good to him: he is incompetent to do the good which satisfies God.

158 The Lord took up the young ruler on his own assumption that he could do good, for the purpose of bringing out what he was. The good Master that he had appealed to puts to the test what his heart really is. "Yet lackest thou one thing; sell all that thou hast . . . and come, follow me." Would he give up self-importance? After all, he loved his riches too well. "He was very sorrowful; for he was very rich." Had not such things been promised as a blessing to the Jews? Christ shews them to be a snare. But then they do much good! Nay, are they good for your heart? It is not that they may not be used in grace; but the man did not know his own heart. Good is not there, nor the strength to produce it. Every motive which governs man is rooted up by the cross. But all within is bad, and I can never work a thing fit for God out of bad material. I need God therefore, who can give me a new and holy nature, who can be merciful to me because He is above all sin. The spring of all good is, that it flows from God and not man. It is an impossibility, as far as man is concerned, that any should be saved. Sin has ruined man and all his hopes. If one looks at the means he can avail himself of, they are wholly useless to save him. But "the things which are impossible with men," said the Saviour, "are possible with God." Such is the sole foundation for the sinner.

On the other hand (v. 28-30), if Peter is quick to speak of the devotedness of the disciples, in leaving all and following Jesus, the Lord shews the certainty that every loss, for the kingdom's sake, will turn into manifold gain, both now and in the world to come.

But He binds it all up (v. 31-33) with what was coming on His own person. They were going up to Jerusalem; but for what? He, the Messiah, "shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death." All hopes must end here: "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." Even He, if He is to deliver the lost, must come down to the dust of death. Christ has no association with sinful man. How then can He deliver? He must die for us; He cannot take corruption into union with Himself. A living Christ, we may reverently say, could not deliver us, consistently with God's nature and character;

redemption was a necessity. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

159 But it was the only means of a holy salvation; man's full wickedness came out in the rejection and death of Christ. He hated what is in God and Him who is God - hated both the Son and the Father. All question of human justice is settled and negatived for ever. Alas! the disciples understood none of these things, neither His shame and death, nor His resurrection. It was the accomplishment of what the prophets had written concerning the Son of man. But they knew not what He said nor what they wrote. The death of Christ would manifest what man was, and what God was; His resurrection would evince the power of life that can deliver the dead. But He was not understood.

Verse 34 closed that part of our Gospel which shews the bringing in of the new and heavenly dispensation. With verse 35 we enter on the historical account of the Lord's final intercourse with the Jews. "Son of man" was the general character of the Gospel, but now, in the midst of Israel, He takes up that of Son of David. Jericho was the first place Israel had to say to when they crossed the Jordan, and a special curse was pronounced against it. But Israel had not walked in obedience, and the Messiah enters not as the king in outward glory, but as the rejected Jesus of Nazareth, with blessing for the remnant that received Him in faith.

"And it came to pass that as he was nigh unto Jericho," etc. It is not "came nigh," as if it were necessarily His first approach, but a general expression, just as applicable to His being nigh on His leaving the city. (Compare Matthew and Mark.) "A certain blind man sat by the way side, begging . . . and he cried, saying Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." He was rebuked by many, but there was the perseverance of faith, and he cried so much the more, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Here was a sample of the power of the Name that Israel rejected. The eye of the blind was opened then, as it will be in the remnant by-and-by.

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