

Luke 21

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the judgment on Jerusalem and the Gentiles, the kingdom of God, and the coming of the Son of man, emphasizing the importance of devotion, dependence on God, and the distinction between the kingdom of God and the gospel of His grace.

Scripture: Luke 21:1-6, Luke 21:8-9, Luke 21:12-28, Luke 21:31-38

Topics: "Judgment and Deliverance", "Faith and Giving"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the contrast between the hypocrisy of the scribes and the genuine devotion of the widow in Luke 21, illustrating how true giving comes from a heart fully devoted to God. He highlights that the widow's two mites, given out of her poverty, exemplify a sincere faith that trusts in God's provision, unlike the ostentatious gifts of the wealthy. Darby also discusses the impending judgment on Jerusalem, the trials the disciples would face, and the broader implications of these events for both Jews and Gentiles. He notes that while the disciples would endure persecution, they were to remain steadfast in their testimony, as the coming of the Son of Man would ultimately bring deliverance. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the moral principles that apply to all believers, regardless of the specific historical context.

Transcript

At the close of chapter 20 and the beginning of chapter 21 we have a most instructive, though painful, contrast between the selfish hypocrisy of the scribes, whom He condemns before the people, and the real devoted love of the widow, whom He singles out for honour. Remark also that the Lord knows how to separate the intention of a sincere soul from the system that surrounds it, judging the whole state of that with which the individual is associated. Observe, further, the difference of giving one's living and one's superfluity. It is easy to compliment God with presents, and thus really minister to self; but she who gives her living gives herself in devotedness to God, and proves her dependence on God. Thus, the two mites of her who had these only expressed all this perfectly: for there was need and everything else to hinder, while the applause of men and the pride of the donor found no place here. For Jewish splendour the act had little worth; but the Lord saw, and bore witness of, the poor widow, blessed in her deed.

Verses 5 and following. The account which the Lord gives in this Gospel of the sorrows of Jerusalem is also, like the preceding, much more allied to the simple fact of the judgment on the nation and the change of dispensation. It differs much from Matthew 24, which fully refers to what is to arrive at the end; while our

Gospel bears, more than the first two, on the then present time and setting aside of Jerusalem. Hence, Luke plainly sets forth the siege and destruction by Titus, and the times of the Gentiles. Let it be observed also that the question in verse 7 extends only to the predicted destruction. Consequently, in what follows, we have the judgment on the nation taken as a whole, from its then destruction till the times of the Gentiles (with whose economy this Gospel is so much occupied) be fulfilled. Nation should rise against nation, signs from heaven and sorrows on earth follow. And before all these the disciples would be objects of hostility, but this would turn for a testimony instead of destroying theirs. They were to go on testifying, while the unhappy devoted city where they were filled up its iniquity. The Lord would permit trial, but not a hair of their head would be lost. But this would close. The sign given here is in no wise the abomination of desolation, but an historical fact - Jerusalem encompassed with armies. Its desolation now approached. They were then to flee, not to return. These were days of vengeance (it is not said of the unprecedented tribulation, as in Matthew, which is only in the latter day). All that was written was to be fulfilled. Great distress there was in the land, and wrath on this people. Slaughter first and captivity afterwards wrought their cruel work of devastation, and Jerusalem till this hour abides, the boast and prey of Gentile lords, and so must it be till their day is over.

169 In these earlier verses (8-19) the Lord dwells on the dangers, duties, and trials of the disciples before the sack of Titus. Specially were they to beware of a pretended deliverer, and of the cry that the time (that is, of deliverance) was at hand. Neither were they to be terrified by wars or commotions, any more than seduced by fair promises. These things must first be, but the end not immediately. Besides, it was not only confusion and woes and signs of coming change and evil outside. Before all these they themselves were to be in affliction and persecution for Christ's sake.

Then in verses 20-24, comes the actual judgment of the city and people, already judged virtually by His rejection. This extends down to our own days in principle. But all is not yet fulfilled. For in verse 25 begins the Lord's description of the closing scene - a judgment not on the Jews merely, but on the Gentiles also; for the powers of the heavens, the source of authority, shall be shaken, as in Haggai 2 and Hebrews 12. This is not said to be immediately after the siege of Titus; but on the contrary, room is left for the long course of treading down of Jerusalem under Gentiles, till their times are run out. It is in Matthew that we must look for the great tribulation of the last days, occupied as the first evangelist is with the consequences of Messiah's rejection, especially to Israel. Therefore it is said there, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days," that is, the short crisis of "Jacob's trouble" yet to come. Here, however, after mention of the times of the Gentiles, it is said that "there shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and waves roaring, men's hearts failing them," etc. Men were astounded because they saw not the end, and trembled as they were dragged along to some unknown awful conclusion. For principles were at work, they knew not how, dragging them along whether or no.

170 The coming of the Son of man disclosed all the scene to the disciples. But it is clear from the circumstances, and especially from the character of the redemption spoken of (v. 28), that it is a question, not of Christians, but of earthly disciples, and of an earthly deliverance by judgment here below. The Lord in mercy turns the terror of man into a sign of deliverance for the remnant of that day.

Verses 31, 32 are interesting in this point of view here, because they furnish remarkable evidence, first, that the kingdom of God does not mean the gospel of His grace; and, secondly, that this generation cannot refer to the space of time from the prophecy to the destruction of Jerusalem.

1. For when they see these things coming to pass (and He had spoken of the final, universal trouble for the whole habitable earth, and not merely of what has befallen the Jews), they are to conclude that the kingdom of God is nigh. Now, even if it were only the Romans taking away their place and nation, and still more if it include the latter-day trouble, it is undeniable that the gospel had extended far and wide before the first. In fact, the manifestation of its influence was declining rather before that time, as we see in the later epistles. But the things here seen were signs like the budding of the trees, and the kingdom of God is evidently to be at the coming of the King, when the Lord God Almighty takes His great power and reigns. That there was a partial analogous judgment, when Jerusalem fell, is true, but verses 25-28 ought to leave no doubt of a wider subsequent judgment, with signs which introduce, not the sorrows of the Jews, but the Son of man coming in His kingdom.

2. For a similar reason, "this generation" does not apply to a mere lifetime, but is viewed morally, as in Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 12, and many other scriptures. It is here expressly put at the close, after not only the fall of Jerusalem, but the totally distinct scene of Christ's coming in power and glory. The expression in verse 33 is very solemn. Deeper interests were involved than a casual change as to Jerusalem. The time was wrapped up in purposed obscurity, but nothing more sure than the facts predicted.

The Lord has provided for His then disciples what was needful, but also in the written word for the like times to come. Still, though the principle be always true, verse 34 clearly applies to a day to come on the earth. The privilege is to escape the judgments, and stand before the Son of man. This again is earthly, not the rapture to heaven. The great moral principles, of course, remain true for all; specially indeed for those who, by virtue of a higher calling, can enjoy them in a more excellent way.

171 Verses 37, 38. The Lord yet returned to give testimony, walking and working in the day; but His resting-place was there, whence He did depart, and where His feet shall stand in that day. Patient in service, He taught daily and early in the temple; at night He was separate from the judged city. His time was now come.

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