

Matthew 11

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon highlights the definitive judgment of the nation, the rejection of Jesus Christ, and the significance of the kingdom being announced.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-2, Matthew 11:2-6, Matthew 11:11-12, Matthew 11:25-30, Luke 4:18, John 1:18, Romans 10:12-13, Ephesians 2:8-9

Topics: "The Nature of the Kingdom", "Faith and Submission"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Matthew 11, illustrating the definitive judgment of Israel and the contrasting responses to Jesus' ministry. He highlights John the Baptist's inquiry about Jesus' identity, emphasizing the need for faith to recognize the true nature of the Messiah amidst His humble appearance. Darby explains that the kingdom of God was being preached, requiring a violent faith to enter, as the proud rejected the grace offered by Jesus. He underscores the importance of submission to God's will, as exemplified by Christ, who calls the weary to find rest in Him. Ultimately, the sermon reveals the profound grace of God that extends beyond Israel to all who seek Him, regardless of their background.

Transcript

From that hour we find the definitive judgment of the nation, not indeed as yet openly declared (that is in chapter 12), nor by the cessation of Christ's ministry, which wrought, notwithstanding the opposition of the nation, in gathering out the remnant, and in the still more important effect of the manifestation of Emmanuel; but it is unfolded in the character of His discourses, in the positive declarations which describe the condition of the people, and in the Lord's conduct amid circumstances which gave rise to the expression of the relations in which He stood towards them.

Having sent His disciples away to preach, He continues the exercise of His own ministry. The report of the works of Christ reaches John in prison. He, in whose heart, notwithstanding his prophetic gift, there still remained something of Jewish thoughts and hopes, sends by his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the One who should come, or if they were still to look for another. [See Footnote #30] God allowed this question in order to put everything in its place. Christ, being the Word of God ought to be His own witness. He ought to bear testimony to Himself as well as to John, and not to receive testimony from the latter; and this He did in the presence of John's disciples He healed all the diseases of men, and preached the gospel to the poor; and John's messengers were to set before him this true testimony of what Jesus was. John was to receive it. It was by these things men were tested. Blessed was he who should not be offended at the

lowly exterior of the King of Israel. God manifest in the flesh did not come to seek the pomp of royalty, although it was His due, but the deliverance of suffering men. His work revealed a character much more profoundly divine, which had a spring of action far more glorious than that which depended on the possession of the throne of David—than a deliverance which would have set John at liberty, and put an end to the tyranny that had imprisoned him.

To undertake this ministry, to go down into the scene of its exercise, to bear the sorrows and the burdens of His people might be an occasion of stumbling to a carnal heart that was looking for the appearance of a glorious kingdom which would satisfy the pride of Israel. But was it not more truly divine more necessary to the condition of the people as seen of God? The heart of each one therefore would be thus tested, to shew whether he belonged to that repentant remnant, who discerned the ways of God, or to the proud multitude, who only sought their own glory, possessing neither a conscience exercised before God, nor a sense of their need and misery.

Having set John under the responsibility of receiving this testimony, which put all Israel to the test, and distinguished the remnant from the nation in general, the Lord then bears witness to John himself, addressing the multitude, and reminding them how they had followed the preaching of John. He shews them the exact point to which Israel had come in the ways of God. The introduction, in testimony, of the kingdom made the difference between that which preceded and that which followed. Among all that are born of women there had been none greater than John the Baptist, none who had been so near Jehovah, sent before His face, none who had rendered Him a more exact and complete testimony, who had been so separate from all evil by the power of the Spirit of God—a separation proper to the fulfilment of such a mission among the people of God. Still he had not been in the kingdom: it was not yet established; and to be in the presence of Christ in His kingdom, enjoying the result of the establishment of His glory, [See Footnote #31] was a greater thing than all testimony to the coming of the kingdom.

Nevertheless from the time of John the Baptist there was a notable change. >From that time the kingdom was announced. It was not established, but it was preached. This was a very different thing from the prophecies that spoke of the kingdom for a yet distant period, while recalling the people to the law as given by Moses. The Baptist went before the King, announcing the nearness of the kingdom, and commanding the Jews to repent that they might enter into it; Thus the law and the prophets spake on God's part until John. The law was the rule; the prophets, maintaining the rule, strengthened the hopes and the faith of the remnant. Now, the energy of the Spirit impelled men to force their way through every difficulty and all the opposition of the leaders of the nation and of a blinded people, that they might at all costs attain the kingdom of a King rejected by the blind unbelief of those who should have received Him. It needed—seeing that the King had come in humiliation, and that He had been rejected—it needed this violence to enter the kingdom. The strait gate was the only entrance.

If faith could really penetrate the mind of God therein, John was the Elias who should come. He that had ears to hear, let him hear. It was in fact for those only.

Had the kingdom appeared in the glory and in the power of its Head, violence would not have been necessary; it would have been possessed as the certain effect of that power; but it was the will of God that they should morally be tested. It was thus also that they ought to have received Elias in spirit.

The result is given in the Lord's words which follow, that is, the true character of this generation, and the ways of God in relation to the Person of Jesus, manifested by His rejection itself. As a generation the

threatenings of justice, and the attractions of grace were equally lost upon them. The children of wisdom, those whose consciences were taught of God, acknowledged the truth of John's testimony, as against themselves, and the grace, so necessary to the guilty, of the ways of Jesus.

John, separate from the iniquity of the nation, had, in their eyes, a devil. Jesus, kind to the most wretched, they accused of falling in with evil ways. Yet the evidence was powerful enough to have subdued the heart of a Tyre or Sodom; and the righteous rebuke of the Lord warns the perverse and unbelieving nation of a more terrible judgment than that which awaited the pride of Tyre or the corruption of Sodom.

But this was a test for the most favoured of mankind. It might have been said, Why was the message not sent to Tyre, ready to hearken? Why not to Sodom, that that city might have escaped the fire that consumed it? It is that man must be tested in every way; that the perfect counsels of God may be developed. If Tyre or Sodom had abused the advantages which a God of creation and of providence had heaped upon them, the Jews were to manifest what was in the heart of man, when possessing all the promises and made the depositaries of all the oracles of God.

They boasted of the gift, and departed from the Giver. Their blinded heart acknowledged not and even rejected their God.

The Lord felt the contempt of His people whom He loved; but, as the obedient man on earth, He submitted to the will of His Father, who, acting in sovereignty, the Lord of heaven and earth, manifested, in the exercise of this sovereignty, divine wisdom, and the perfection of His character. Jesus accepts the will of His Father in its effects, and, thus subject, sees its perfection.

It was befitting that God should reveal to the lowly all the gifts of His grace in Jesus, this Emmanuel on earth; and that He should hide them from the pride that sought to scrutinise and to judge them. But this opens the door to the glory of God's counsels in it.

The truth was, that His Person was too glorious to be fathomed or understood by man, although His words and His works left the nation without excuse, in their refusal to come unto Him that they might know the Father.

Jesus, subject to His Father's will, although thoroughly sensible of all that was painful to His heart in its effects, sees the whole extent of the glory that should follow His rejection. All things were delivered unto Him of His Father. It is the Son who is revealed to our faith, the veil that covered His glory being taken away now that He is rejected as Messiah. No one knoweth Him but the Father. Who among the proud could fathom what He was? He who from all eternity was one with the Father, become man, surpassed, in the deep mystery of His being, all knowledge save that of the Father Himself. The impossibility of knowing Him who had emptied Himself to become man, maintained the certainty, the reality, of His divinity, which this self-renunciation might have hidden from the eyes of unbelief. The incomprehensibility of a being in a finite form revealed the infinite which was therein. His divinity was guaranteed to faith, against the effect of His humanity on the mind of man. But if no one knew the Son, except the Father only, the Son, who is truly God, was able to reveal the Father. No man has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed Him. No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. Wretched ignorance that in its pride rejects Him! It was thus according to the good pleasure of the Son that this revelation was made. Distinctive attribute of divine perfection! He came for this purpose; He did it according to His own wisdom. Such was the truth of man's relations with Him, although He submitted to the painful humiliation of being rejected by His own people, as the final test of

their, of man's state.

Observe also here, that this principle, this truth, with regard to Christ, opens the door to the Gentiles, to all who should be called. He reveals the Father to whomsoever He will. He always seeks the glory of His Father. He alone can reveal Him-He to whom the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, has delivered all things; The Gentiles are included in the rights conferred by this title, even every family in heaven and earth. Christ exercises these rights in grace, calling whom He will to the knowledge of the Father.

Thus we find here the perverse and faithless generation; a remnant of the nation justifying the wisdom of God as manifested in John and in Jesus in judgment and in grace; the sentence of judgment on the unbelievers; the rejection of Jesus in the character in which He had presented Himself to the nation; and His perfect submission, as man, to the will of His Father in this rejection, giving occasion for the manifestation to His soul of the glory proper to Him as Son of God-a glory which no man could know, even as He alone could reveal that of the Father. So that the world who refused Him was in total ignorance, save at the good pleasure of Him who delights in revealing the Father.

We should also remark here, that the mission of the disciples to Israel who rejected Christ continues (if Israel be in the land) until He comes as the Son of man, His title of judgment and of glory as heir of all things (that is to say, until the judgment by which He takes possession of the land of Canaan, in a power that leaves no room for His enemies). This, His title of judgment and glory as heir of all things, is mentioned in John 5, Daniel 7, Psalms 8 and 80.

Observe too, that in chapter 11, the perverseness of the generation that had rejected John's testimony, and that of the Son of man come in grace and associating Himself in grace with the Jews, opens the door to the testimony of the glory of the Son of God, and to the revelation of the Father by Him in sovereign grace-a grace that could make Him known as efficaciously to a poor Gentile as to a Jew. It was no longer a question of responsibility to receive, but of sovereign grace that imparted to whomsoever it would. Jesus knew man, the world, the generation which had enjoyed the greatest advantages of all that were in the world. There was no place for the foot to rest on in the miry slough of that which had departed from God. In the midst of a world of evil Jesus remained the sole revealer of the Father, the source of all good. Whom does He call? What does He bestow on those who come? Only source of blessing and revealer of the Father, He calls all those who are weary and heavy laden. Perhaps they did not know the spring of all misery, namely, separation from God, sin. He knew, and He alone could heal them. If it was the sense of sin which burdened them, so much the better. Every way the world no longer satisfied their hearts; they were miserable, and therefore the objects of the heart of Jesus. Moreover He would give them rest; He does not here explain by what means; He simply announces the fact. The love of the Father, which in grace, in the Person of the Son, sought out the wretched, would bestow rest (not merely alleviation or sympathy, but rest) on every one that came to Jesus. It was the perfect revelation of the Father's name to the heart of those that needed it; and that by the Son;-peace, peace with God. They had but to come to Christ: He undertook all and gave rest. But there is a second element in rest. There is more than peace through the knowledge of the Father in Jesus. And more than that is needed; for, even when the soul is perfectly at peace with God, this world presents many causes of trouble to the heart. In these cases it is a question of submission or of self-will. Christ, in the consciousness of His rejection, in the deep sorrow caused by the unbelief of the cities in which He had wrought so many miracles, had just manifested the most entire submission to His Father, and had found therein perfect rest to His soul. To this He calls all that heard Him, all that felt the need of rest to their own souls. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," that is to say, the yoke of entire submission to His Father's will, learning of Him how to meet the troubles of

life; for He was "meek and lowly in heart," content to be in the lowest place at the will of His God. In fact nothing can overthrow one who is there. It is the place of perfect rest to the heart.

Footnotes for Matthew 11

30: His sending to Jesus shews full confidence in His word as a prophet but ignorance as to His Person; and this is what is brought out here in its full light.

31: This is not God's assembly; but the rights of the King as manifested in glory being established, the foundation being laid, Christians are in the kingdom and the patience of Jesus Christ, who is glorified but hidden in God. They share the destiny of the King, and will share His glory when He reigns.

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