

Luke 8

by John Nelson Darby

The Lord presents Himself as a new centre, to which and round which His people are gathered, and He turns to the Gentiles because Israel refused to be gathered.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:6, Isaiah 65:2, Matthew 23:37, Luke 8:4-15, Luke 8:19-25, Luke 8:41-56, John 16:33, Acts 13:46-47, Romans 8:37-39

Topics: "The New Covenant", "Faith in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes in his sermon on 'Luke 8' that Jesus Christ is the new center of gathering for His people, replacing the old covenant with Israel. He illustrates how Israel's rejection of Christ leads to the inclusion of the Gentiles, highlighting the parable of the sower to show the varied responses to God's word. Darby explains that true faith is demonstrated through perseverance and fruitfulness, even amidst trials, as exemplified by the disciples' fear during a storm and the healing of Jairus' daughter. He stresses that Christ's presence assures believers of safety and peace, regardless of external circumstances. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, abiding faith in Christ as the source of life and hope.

Transcript

We have seen, in what has preceded, the Lord presenting Himself, by His words and His work, as a new centre, to which and round which His people were gathered. Before this, Jehovah had been the centre, when Israel was the gathering point; for Jehovah was among the Jews, and the temple the place where He met with the people. But now the Son is here, "God manifest in the flesh," and He must be the centre of everything. But Israel would not be gathered, as the Lord Himself said in Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . but ye would not." Again in Isaiah 65:2, "I have spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people."

Israel could not have the blessing, for the flesh could not hold it. The flesh, simply looked at as such, is "as grass" (Isaiah 40). "All flesh is grass." We have these two great principles running through the latter chapters of Isaiah; first that flesh, as flesh, could not hold the blessing, and be the depository for the promises. For when all grace came, in the person of the Lord, the people to whom He was sent He found withered down like grass. "Surely the people is grass: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever." But God was not going to give up His purpose. Therefore in chapter 49 we find Jehovah says unto Christ, "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Then Christ says, If God is to be glorified in Israel, "I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought, and in

vain, yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah, and my reward with my God." Then saith Jehovah, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorified in the eyes of Jehovah. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth."

78 This is what Christ is becoming in Luke's Gospel - "a light to lighten the Gentiles," etc. And afterwards we find Paul quoting, with the perfect accuracy of the Spirit, this very scripture, so exactly fitted for them, to the Jews at Antioch. "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto you, but seeing ye judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo! we turn to the Gentiles," etc. (Acts 13:46, 47: and again, Acts 28:28). Israel will be gathered afterwards, for Christ will hereafter raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel; but before this He turns to the Gentiles. All this the Lord pictures to us in Luke. In chapter 7 we see Israel refused both John the Baptist and Christ; but "wisdom is justified of her children." The Pharisees and lawyers did not justify God at all, for they saw no beauty in Jesus, whereas the publicans did; and thus the poor woman, "who was a sinner," whose heart was touched by the grace of God, is the true child of wisdom, and is brought in here as an illustration of Christ being the new centre of blessing, "though Israel be not gathered."

The Lord then goes on with His testimony, gathering by the word, first, by parables, as in chapter 8, and then in chapter 9 sending forth His disciples to preach, with this commission, to shake off the dust from their feet, if they are not received, a token of the last testimony being rendered, when they are given up.

Here are two classes of persons gathered round Christ. First, the twelve apostles were public witnesses, fitted by divine grace to be the vessels of testimony, manifesting the electing power of God in calling them, and sending them forth in all the energy of ministry; Christ's apostles, sent out by Himself - "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" - His chosen ones. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," etc. Then, secondly, there were others who were gathered by affection round Him, having no place of office in the church, but those whose hearts were touched and drawn round Him, not sent out like the first class, but not less devoted in heart than the apostles, for they followed Him and ministered to Him of their substance.

79 In verses 4-8 we have the parable of the sower; and here, as previously remarked, it is not the kingdom brought out as in Matthew, but the testimony as to what and whom Christ was gathering, and not as to the form the kingdom would take afterwards. The very fact of Christ coming as the sower proved that Israel was set aside; for had it been now to Israel as His vineyard, He must have come seeking fruit from the vine He had long before planted. He had come to Israel previously, seeking fruit and finding none. He now comes in the new character of the sower, which is quite another thing. He comes into a waste world, where there was nothing, and He begins a fresh work. God is not now looking for fruit from man in one sense, because man has been proved to be a bad tree: and the more you dig about and dung a bad tree, the more bad fruit it produces. "A tree is known by its fruits." Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. God is now going to produce the fruit He requires. He is not now looking for man to produce anything, for John the Baptist said, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Therefore the Lord now comes as sower? not looking for fruit, but doing that which will produce it.

He then goes on to describe the character and effect of the sowing, and the disciples ask the meaning of the parable (v. 9-15). Israel, as such, had forfeited its place, and therefore was "a people of no understanding" (Isa. 27:11). Long patience had waited on Israel. Seven hundred years had passed since the word was given to Isaiah, "Go tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not." As individuals they

might be drawn round the person of the Lord, but as a nation they were blinded. The disciples had an explanation of the parable, but as a nation the Lord speaks to them in parables (see v. 10), thus fulfilling to the nation the very words spoken by the prophet so long before. Now the testimony is closed as to Israel, though not as to God's final purpose respecting them.

80 The seed is sown indiscriminately, and although man rejects it, because his will is opposed, nevertheless it is sown in his heart; for this parable shews how the word of God is perfectly adapted to the need of man, meeting his conscience and heart. "Never man spake like this man." Christ's word came with a power that reached the heart and affections; the will is corrupt and therefore resists it. It is not abstract grace here, but the condition of man that is recognised; therefore we find the word so perfectly suited to the need, not claiming righteousness from man, but coming in with power to shew him that he is a sinner, and laying open the thoughts and intents of the heart. When the heart is thus detected, the word comes, with all gentleness and comfort, for healing and rest, because there is grace to meet a soul in whatever state it may be found. The heart is spoken to, and therefore the gospel leaves man without excuse.

Some too received the word with joy (v. 13). This was a proof that the conscience was untouched; for when that is reached it is anything but joy, until forgiveness is known. The feelings may be moved for a time, and the word be listened to with a joy which will give place to sorrow. The reason truth is thus flippantly taken up with joy is because there is no root, and so it is received in joy, and given up in trouble.

Another class is where thorns spring up and choke the word. The understanding may be convinced and receive the truth; but the cares, pleasures, and riches of this world come in and choke the word. Now these "cares" are most subtle things, because they enter as necessary duties, and there is no sin in doing one's duty. Nay, it is right that a man should do his duty in his daily calling. But if these duties choke the word, and a man loses his soul through it, what then? The natural tendency of the heart often needs to be met with that word, "Take heed and beware of covetousness" (chap. 12). It is the love of possession. One came to the Lord, saying, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." The heart wanted to keep it. If love of the world or covetousness gets in amongst the saints, it is an insidious thing and most difficult to meet, because it is often not open to discipline; and yet, if covetousness slips into the heart, it checks the power of Christ over the soul and conscience, and eats out the practical life of the Christian, and his soul is withered, withered, withered. It may be checked by the - power of God coming in; but this covetous care about earthy things is so subtle that, while there is nothing on which to lay the hand, the practical power of Christian life in the soul is gone, though of course, I need hardly say, eternal life can never be lost in those who once had it.

81 "That on the good ground are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." They may seem to the world to be fruits bright and blessed, but if people have not got Christ they tire. There will be no enduring, unless Christ has possession of the soul; but if He has, there will be an abiding motive, and people will go on, and "bring forth fruit with patience." They that hear and keep it go steadily on, having their motive for action in the Lord. Trouble may come in, in the church; disappointment may arise, even from brethren; but they go on just the same, because they have got Christ before them: for the word they have heard and keep connects them with Christ, and He is more than anything else.

This is a question, not of eternal salvation, but of the practical effect of the word as seen in this world (v. 16-18) - the growth of the word in the soul, and that will not be hidden under a bushel. "Ye are the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." In those who only appear to be Christians it soon comes to nothing.

"Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." But those in whom the word works effectually are to be as a "candle" set on a candlestick. Israel being set aside for a season, God sets up a new light in the world; a light lit up by God because of the world's darkness. When Christ was here He was the light of the world, because of its darkness, and now we should be a light in the world, as we are "light in the Lord." The light is here set up by Christ's word, and people are responsible for the word received. Suppose you have heard the word and bring forth no fruit, it will all come out, by-and-by, that you have heard the word and lost it, and the spiritual power accompanying it. For, even if you are saints, all that you have heard without fruit or power resulting there from, it will come out; for nothing is hid that shall not be known or come abroad. "Take heed how ye hear."

82 Christ is looking for the results of His sowing. There must be not only the hearing, but the possessing, and in this rests the responsibility; for if you keep the word which you have heard, more shall be given you. If, on hearing, I possess that which I hear, not merely have joy in receiving it, but possess it as my own, then it becomes a part of the substance of my soul, and I shall get more; for when the truth has become a substance in my soul, there is a capacity for receiving more. Suppose, for example, you hear the truth of the Lord's second coming and see your portion in the bride of Christ, and you do not lay hold of it practically, so as to possess it (have communion with God about it, which is possession); you will presently lose the expectation of His coming and forget your place of separation from the world, and the truth will gradually slip away, because you are not holding it in your soul before God. Consequently your soul becomes dead and dull, and you lose the very truth you have received.

Thus, if one lives daily as waiting for the Lord from heaven, there will be no planning for the future, no laying up for the morrow; such a man will learn more and more, as other truths will open round this one grand central one, and he will be kept in the truth. If, on the other hand, he drops this centre truth by saying, "He cannot come yet; so many things must happen first," then is the progress of such an one's communion with God hindered, for, as we have said, it is according to what a man has heard and holds with God that there can be any growth; for what is the use of teaching me that the Lord may come to-morrow, if I am going on living as though He were not coming for a hundred years? Or where is the comfort and blessedness of the truth to my soul, if I am saying in my heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming?" Though I cannot lose my eternal life, yet if I am losing the truth and light I have had, I shall be merely floating on in the current of life, half world and half Christ, and all power of Christian life will be dimmed in my soul. If the truth is held in communion with God, it separates to Himself. Truth is to produce fruit, and you have no truth that does not bear fruit. Truth must build up the soul. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Christ becomes precious in and by the truth that I learn; and if it has not that power, it all drops out, comes to nothing, and is taken away. If Christ is precious to me, I shall be waiting for Him with affection, and if it is not so, the bare truth will soon be given up.

83 Verses 19-21. Here He closes up His connection with Israel after the flesh, for the relations of mother and brethren put Him into connection with Israel after the flesh. Observe, He here distinguishes the remnant by the word "these," as He did in chapter 6 by the word "ye." His mother and His brethren came to Him on the ground of natural relationship only; and there was all natural affection in the Lord, as on the cross we find Him remembering His mother, and commending her to the care of John. But He replies here, as much as to say, "I am not on that ground now - my mother and my brethren are these, which hear the word of God and do it." Israel was now given up as to that position, the Lord owning and acknowledging only those to be His relations on whose hearts and consciences the word of God had taken effect. It was not what was found in nature, but what was produced by grace, and, being thus produced by power

through the word, the principle is hereby established, that it might go out to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, although not fully brought out until after His resurrection. In these three verses we have a judicial sentence on Israel, which closes in verse 21.

In verses 22-26 it is a parabolical display of what we may expect if we follow the Lord, and the opening out of what the Lord would be to those tried by such circumstances. The consequence of being the disciples and companions of Jesus is that they get into jeopardy every hour - they are not on terra firma, but are tossed about on the troubled sea, and Christ Himself absent ("asleep"). There came down a storm of wind on the lake, the ship was filled with water, and they filled with fear were in jeopardy. But the fact was, Christ was in the same boat with them. He who made the worlds, the Son of God, was with them, and yet they are afraid! and cry out, "we perish"; as though He could be drowned, thus shewing they had no sense of who He was that was with them in the boat. To us, now calmly reading the circumstances, what absurdity there seems in such unbelief; when alas! is it not just the same with ourselves, spiritually? Have we no sense of jeopardy, when tossed about, and trouble is in the church? In truth we have, for there is many a heart saying, "Who will shew us any good?" forgetting what God is acting and doing, though man is battling to all appearance against God's purposes; but God is not baffled, and He is calmly carrying on His purposes, through all the storms of men's or devils' raising. In John 16 we find the disciples sorrowing because Jesus was going away; and the Lord had said to them (chap. 14), "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father." In chapter 16 Jesus says, "Now I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? but because I have said these things, sorrow hath filled your hearts." God was accomplishing His blessed purposes in redemption by Christ's going. You forget that God is acting in all this, for you cannot suppose that God is so baffled as to give up His purpose. The disciples thought, when Jesus was crucified, that all their hopes were disappointed; they say, "we thought it had been he that should have redeemed Israel." In fact, in that very act and at that very moment, all was being accomplished for them. Where is the Lord going? should have been their question. It is not now that there seems no jeopardy, no confusion, no sorrow; but faith looks at and through it all to God, and asks, What is the Lord doing? Where is the Lord going?

84 In and through all the trouble the Lord has not turned a hair's-breadth out of His way. We may be in distress, but faith will not say the Lord is far away, but will know Him nigh at hand. The Lord let them be in jeopardy, the ship filled with water, and Himself asleep, on purpose to put their faith to the test, to prove if they were really trusting Him; and that it might be seen if such foolish thoughts would arise, when they were put into jeopardy. They say, "Lord, we perish"; but they were in the ship with Christ, and could they be drowned? He said to them, Where is your faith? Well might He say thus to them, for though the water was in the boat, He was there too, and could sleep through it all. It was not so much of Him they were thinking as of themselves. "We perish" (said they), and it is just the same now; for the fact of being in danger with Christ in the boat is the same at one time as at another - just as impossible now as then; and in truth Christ is much more with us now, being more perfectly revealed to us, and we are united to Him, one with Him, so that He is with us every moment in the power of the Spirit.

85 However high the waves may rise, there is no drowning His love and thoughts towards us. The test is to our faith. The question is, Have we that faith which so realises Christ's presence as to keep us as calm and composed in the rough sea as the smooth? It was not really a question of the rough or the smooth sea, when Peter was sinking in the water, for he would have sunk without Christ, just as much in the smooth as in the rough sea. The fact was, the eye was off Jesus on the wave, and that made him sink. If we go on with Christ, we shall get into all kinds of difficulty, many a boisterous sea; but being one with

Him, His safety is ours. The eye should be off events, although they be ever so solemn, and surely they are so at this present time, and I feel them to be so; for none perhaps has a deeper sense than I of the growth of evil, and of the solemn state of things; but I know all is as settled and secure as if the whole world were favourable. I quite dread the way many dear saints are looking at events, and not looking at Christ and for Christ. The Lord Himself is the security of His people, and, let the world go on as it may, no events can touch Christ. We are safe on the sea if only we have the eye off the waves, with the heart concentrated on Christ and on the interests of Christ. Then the devil himself cannot touch us.

Verse 26. We have a solemn picture of the consequence of Christ's rejection by the world! Christ comes and finds them utterly under the power of the devil. A man of the Gadarenes was possessed, but He delivers him, thus shewing that the Lord had complete power over the enemy. With a word from Christ the demons were off. "The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." What was the effect of His thus casting out Satan? Why, the whole multitude of the country round about "besought him [Christ] to depart from them." These Gadarenes, who had borne with the demons because they could not help it, will not bear with Christ, and they beg Him to depart! Man would be glad to bind Legion if he could, for he does not like the effects of the devil's power; but man's will is against Christ; he has a deliberate determined hatred to Christ. The Lord came to the world full of love and power, to deliver from the consequences of sin; but man rejected Him, cast Him out; and God will not stay where the will is determined against Him. When the Gadarenes request Christ to depart, He immediately went up into a ship and returned back again. And mark, the world in which we live is just going on as having quietly rejected Christ. But does God give them up, though Christ is gone away for a season? No, He did not give them up, but sent amongst them this man, whom He had healed, to tell them what great things God had done for him. This is what the disciples did in the world, and the delivered remnant also are to tell the world what great things God has done for them.

86 The swine appear to represent the state of the Jews after their rejection of Christ. The Lord, doubtless, permitted the demons to enter the swine (as the swine having no passions of their own, it was their being possessed with these demons which made them run violently to destruction), shewing it was not merely the evil passions in the men, but their being possessed by wicked spirits, which hurried them on to destruction. And we know historically, from Josephus and others, that one can hardly conceive the infatuation with which the Jews rushed on to their own destruction, when those Gentile powers went and ploughed up the holy city. This is just a consequence of Israel's rejecting the Lord.

Then the Lord gives us two other pictures, through the medium of real events, of His dealings in deliverance. In verse 41 we have Jairus' daughter, who lay a-dying; and here is a picture (dispensationally) of Israel. The Lord was going to heal Israel, who was just like one dying, but while in the way the people throng Him. What He came to do He did, for the world crowded Him while on the way to heal the sick "daughter of my people"; whosoever could touch Him by faith got healing, the activities of grace going forth from Him.

Jairus' daughter "lay a-dying." Man was not pronounced to be dead until Christ was killed. Before Christ came, there was no healing for man. Abraham longed for the day of Christ. There were prophets who spoke of Christ as a healer, blessing was promised, but there was no physician. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" There was none; for no physician could be found to heal man's condition until Christ came, and Him they put to death. In Him there was living power, for when the people thronged Him, a woman does but touch the border of His garment, and virtue goes out of Him to heal her. Healing depended not on the condition of those who were healed, but in the power of the healer.

Physicians might apply remedy after remedy, but it is of no avail, until One came who could impart life; then the case was changed.

87 When the multitude press upon Him, and He recognises the touch of one to have been the touch of faith, He says, "somebody has touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." And now, before the Lord comes forth in resurrection power and glory, to bring life from the dead in Israel, there is perfect healing where there is faith; for the Lord is always alive to the exercise of faith. The woman hid herself, for there was shame in her, because of the consciousness she felt of the disease which had needed to be healed. "But she could not be hid." The heart always shrinks from opening itself, when within itself; but when it looks at Christ, it is opened to Him; for that is always the effect of being in the presence of Jesus. Shame, reputation, character, all give way before the sense of what He is. When grace gets to the bottom of the heart, all else is easily set aside. A link was formed between this woman's soul and Christ. "Thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace." He brings perfect peace and comfort into her heart, for His way is not only to heal, but to make Himself known. She is not only to be cured, but to have the assurance of peace from His own mouth.

Meanwhile they come, saying that Jairus' daughter was dead; "Trouble not the master." They thought He might possibly heal her, while she was living; but now she is dead, they supposed He could do nothing. This is a picture of Israel, who are dead before God (as are Gentiles too, of course). But Jesus encourages them, and says, "Only believe and she shall be made whole." When He came to the house, He suffered no man to go in, save Peter and James and John (the pillars of the future glory, when He will come forth as the resurrection and the life to the dead nation), and the father and the mother of the maiden.

In this chapter we get a picture of what was then doing, and what will come to pass. We have the seed, the word sown, and the effect of it, the use man made of it. We have God's explanation of all that was going on, as being all known and settled in His mind; and if a storm arise, and if Christ appear asleep and insensible to the danger - though "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" - as disciples we are in the same boat with Him. The Lord gives us to rest on that with undivided undistracted hearts: for Christ is in the boat, as well as the water. Only let the eye of faith rest on Christ, then come what may, we shall say, "Who shall separate us," etc. - nay, in all, "more than conquerors." Then the more the trouble, the more the blessing, because of the exercise of faith.

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