

The Coming of the Lord Luke 12

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the essential nature of the Lord's coming as a foundational aspect of Christian faith and life.

Scripture: Luke 12:35

Topics: "The Second Coming of Christ", "Christian Vigilance"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the integral role of the Lord's coming in Christian faith, asserting that it is woven into the very fabric of Christian thought. He explains that while Christ was rejected by the world, His return is essential for the completion of Christianity, as it fulfills the hope of redemption and the promise of being with Him. Darby illustrates this through various biblical references, highlighting the importance of waiting for Christ's return as a defining characteristic of a believer's life. He encourages Christians to remain vigilant and prepared, as the anticipation of Christ's coming should shape their actions and affections. Ultimately, Darby reassures that the joy of being with Christ is the ultimate hope for believers.

Transcript

(Words of Faith, Vol. 3, 1884, page 141.)

My purpose this evening is to speak of the coming of the Lord, but not in order to prove it from scripture, but to shew how it is interwoven with the whole fabric of christian thought, so that if you take it out you rend the whole fabric to pieces. I do not say that there may not be saints resting on the foundation that do not see it; but if I come to the word of God, it is interwoven with the whole scheme (I do not like the word), and that all scripture, in the various thoughts, feelings, and affections of the Christian, are woven and mixed up with it.

You see that the Lord Jesus, beloved friends, has been rejected in the world, and that cannot go on for ever, every knee must bow to Him. Just take the fact as it is: He has been rejected by the world altogether, the world through which we are passing is a world that has rejected the Son of God, whom God has taken to His right hand. The Holy Ghost has come down consequent upon His exaltation, as the Comforter, but the closing of all that state of things is that the Lord comes again and takes His power and glory; therefore the coming and exaltation of the Lord is that without which Christianity is not complete; I cannot believe in His first coming and not see clearly the necessity of the other.

As an illustration, we have the Passover and the passover fulfilled; "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us;" and the feast of Pentecost fulfilled too - the Holy Ghost came down; but when you come to the feast of tabernacles, where do you get it fulfilled? it is not fulfilled, and is yet to come. That is the real meaning of John 7; the feast of tabernacles is there, but He cannot go up to it. His brethren said to Him, "If thou do these things shew thyself unto the world" (John 7:4), but He said, "My time is not yet come;" then at the end of the feast He says, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink; he that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." That is, that He substitutes for the time the presence of the Holy Ghost instead of His being revealed to the world, and that is what we have in Christianity, the Holy Ghost come down from heaven and dwelling in the saints.

The Christian looks back upon what has been done, and looks forward for Christ to come to take him up to heaven; if you leave that out you leave out the thing that completes it all. The Holy Ghost points us forward to Christ, and leads the soul out to the thought and apprehension of His coming. The world having rejected Christ, the Holy Ghost comes down meanwhile; "we see not yet all things put under him." There is this double aspect of it - the world has rejected the Son of God; He must come and execute judgment consequent on His rejection.

But there is another, and blessed side of it, that when He was rejected He accomplished redemption, and having done this, and given the Holy Ghost to those that believe, He is not coming to execute judgment, but to take us to be with Him to execute the judgment with Him. The more we look into scripture, the more we shall see the way in which this expectation of the Lord's return is identified with the thoughts and feelings of the Christian. You may get the general thought if you look at the end of Titus 2, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory," &c.; the grace of God has appeared and brings salvation, teaching us to walk soberly, that is in self-restraint; righteousness towards others; and godly - with God; it embraces the whole Christian life. Grace has appeared; glory, which is the hope, has not. We are saved in hope, not we hope to be saved; we, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness, that is the hope that belongs to faith. Grace hath appeared and brought the salvation, thus shewing us how to walk in this present world, it teaches us this blessed hope, the appearing of the glory.

In Hebrews 9 we see the same thing, verse 24 we find that "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." I look at Christ as in God's presence for me. "Nor yet that he should offer himself often . . . but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The cross was the end of the world, morally speaking; God had finished with man, and therefore He says, "Now is the judgment of this world," &c.; it was the end of the world in that moral sense, the tryings and testings whether righteousness could be got from man are over; the righteousness has come down to us in the gospel. The apostle says he is not ashamed of the gospel, because the righteousness of God is revealed; that made it the end of the world.

Then you see how he speaks of it, "As it is appointed unto men once to die . . . so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Just as grace has appeared once for the putting away of sin, so as regards us, as Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, so to them that look for HIM He will appear the second time without sin - He has done with sin the first time, that is all over, so completely done with it that to those that look for Him He will appear the second time without sin. What for? To take us to glory - "unto salvation." In Hebrews 2 it puts in a distinct way what we find as to His present position, "One in a certain place testified,

saying, What is man that thou art mindful of him . . . thou crownest him with glory and honour." We do not see that He has got the power, but we do see Him crowned with glory and honour, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool, and we are waiting for Him.

I just say here, Suppose people die before the Lord come, well, they are with Christ waiting; "absent from the body, present with the Lord," "to depart and be with Christ which is far better," they are waiting too. The promise we have got is to be conformed to the image of Christ, when He comes. The body is to be raised and changed, to be conformed to the same image. "As is the earthly such are they also that are earthly . . . and as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." I turn to these passages to shew you that what characterises the Christian is, we are waiting for Him.

In John 14, when the Lord was comforting the disciples when He was going away, they had given up everything for Him, and now they were losing Him, He says, "believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. . . I go to prepare a place for you." I am not going back to glory as Man and leave you in the lurch down here. I cannot stay with you (chap. 13), but I am not going to give you up, and therefore I must have you with me. In chapter 13 Peter would not let the Lord wash his feet, it was what slaves did in great houses; then He says, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me." Peter was rejecting it, but then He says, I am not going to give you up, but if I go to God you must be fit to be there. They were really converted and clean through the word (Judas, of course, excepted); He says I have not given up serving you, I must have you to be with me. In John 14 He tells them not to be troubled meanwhile, the Comforter was coming; then He goes on, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." He was going to prepare a place up there, not being able to stay with them here, but would come back again to take them to be with Him. "Unto myself;" that word "myself" is everything. He does not say "to heaven" or "the Father's house."

The coming of the Lord has this special blessing, that it does not leave heaven a vague place. I have found the greatest blessing in the doctrine of the Lord's coming as it brings the Person of Christ before one, He is the object before the eye. This is the way scripture always presents Him. "To depart and to be with Christ is far better." I am speaking of the way the Person of Christ is what fills the eye. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord," and again "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." It is perfectly true, but it is not the vague thought of going to heaven, it is going to Christ; it is of course going to heaven too, but what fills the soul, is that Christ who loved them, who won their hearts through grace (they had given up everything for Him), says, I shall not be satisfied till I bring you up there.

That is the first way He comforts them, and they had seen the Father by seeing Him; then the rest of the chapter speaks of the Holy Ghost who would come and shew that they were in Christ, and Christ in them. When the disciples went out to Bethany to see Him going to heaven, the angels said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner," etc. (Acts 1:11.) There it is His appearing, it is the same general truth, though not His coming to receive us. You cannot talk of death there, Christ is coming in like manner as He went, "so coming," is not a person dying; the angels say He is coming. The Lord was imprinting all this upon their hearts, that when He was gone, the Holy Ghost was here, but what they were looking for was His coming; meanwhile they would be taught by the Holy Ghost, and have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, crying, "Abba Father," by the Holy Ghost, but what the Holy Ghost brings specially before souls is His coming again.

In 1 Thessalonians we have "they themselves shew of us ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven." The world was saying, "here are these people, a new thing that has come, they have left all their idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait," &c.; they were converted not to hold the doctrine merely of His coming but to wait, &c. They had learned of Him, by the Holy Ghost, testifying of Him in the gospel, and therefore they loved Him; there was no conversion then except to wait for God's Son from heaven. Where do we find that now?

Many hold it, and see it thoroughly but who ever talks now of being converted to wait for God's Son? and yet the apostle had not been more than three or four weeks there. In chapter 2, notice the way it is connected with the thoughts and feelings of the Christian, "We, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, for what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" "Crown of rejoicing," (they were won to God) - "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now it is his ministry, he cannot even rejoice in that without thinking of the coming of Christ.

Now, take another thing which belongs to the Christian, that is holiness, "the Lord make you to increase and abound in love unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," &c. (1 Thess. 3:12, 13), in holiness, when? Now? No, at His coming. At His coming it will all appear, and be manifested.

Let us look at the first Epistle of John, it is also in connection with holiness, chapter 3, "Behold what manner of love [puts us in Christ's place], we know that, when he shall appear we shall be like him," &c. we have not seen the glory yet, "it does not yet appear what we shall be," &c., "but we know," &c. If we know that we are to be like Christ (conformity to Christ is in the glory, we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son) we are to walk as He walked, but there is no full conformity till then; it is not being conformed when the body is in the tomb, and the spirit in paradise; the time to be conformed to Him is when we get to the glory, and see Him as He is. "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." If I know that when Christ appears, I shall be like Him, I try to be as like Him as I can now - purifieth himself even as he is pure - it is according to that standard. It is very important thus to see as regards holiness, that it is directly connected with the coming of the Lord. J. N. D.

IF you look, beloved friends, at the case of saints dying as in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." The apostle, though eighteen hundred years have elapsed, did not say, "the Lord delays his coming." I believe it is very near, but that is a question of spiritual discernment. I do not press it, though I believe it; everything shews it. "We" - the living ones will be taken, the dead had not lost it - "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "With the Lord" - that is the point. "To depart" is to be "with Christ." It is not the Father's house, nor is it the Father's love only; but we are to be with Christ, and like Him. Suppose they were put to death for Christ, even so God would bring them back with Him.

You say that now this thought is gone from the mass of Christians; I will shew you how Christ judges when it is gone; but here the comfort given was that they were not deprived of the blessing, but when Christ came He would bring them with Him, He would raise the dead, and change the living. How it enters into all

the apostle's thoughts, comfort, joy, &c.; here he brings it in specially if a saint has died. His coming is interwoven with all the affections of the Christian. It is not merely that I am going to be happy in heaven; but I am going to be with Christ, it is His joy to take me to be with Himself.

Note, again, how Paul connects holiness with the coming of the Lord in 1 Thess. 5:23: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He is looking for holiness and godliness, but he looks for it at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then as regards responsibility turn to 1 Timothy 6:13, 14, and see what he says, "I give thee charge in the sight of God unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is always the appearing when it is responsibility that is in question, but when privilege it is the rapture.

What I have at heart is this, that you should see the way in which the coming of the Lord is interwoven with every thought and true feeling of the Christian. See, too, how James comforts the labourers who had been deprived of their wages, "Be patient, therefore, brethren unto the coming of the Lord." (James 5:7.) The constant expectation of His return was the thing their hearts were to be set upon.

We find the same thing in Matthew 25, in the parable of the virgins. "They took their lamps," that is at the beginning of Christianity, "and went forth to meet the bridegroom;" this is the same truth as in Thessalonians, "they were converted to wait," &c. Then what happens? Just what has happened, "they all slumbered and slept." That is, that the true saints, as well as those that had no oil, they all forgot the coming of the Lord. It is just what the Lord told us would happen, while the Bridegroom tarried. We know the reason of His tarrying, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise," &c. As long as the work of grace is going on, and the Lord is gathering in souls, we must wait, thankfully wait. At midnight there was a cry. "Behold the Bridegroom." Some had no oil but there was time enough between the going out of the cry, and the coming of the Bridegroom, to test their state. I do not doubt it is going on now. It was the cry that woke them up, and then they trim their lamps and go out again, but the point I draw attention to is that what woke them was "Behold the Bridegroom cometh."

As to our affections and as to our service it is the same thing; the talents (the gifts of the Holy Ghost, whatever they may be) were to be used while Christ was away. But what is remarkable is this, that though there was a delay, which has taken place, the Lord never puts the thought that it will be longer than the life of the people He spoke to; the virgins that went asleep were the same that awoke. It is the same servants that got the talents that were in question when He came back; He will not put the thought forward beyond their lifetime. People say, Must not they have known that Peter would die? I say, but would any one dream nowadays of saying he had a personal revelation that he would die? It was an extraordinary exception, which strengthens the rule; to wait for Christ was what they were called to.

When you come to the seven churches (Rev. 2; 3), you find the common thought (it is a just thought) that it is a history of the visible church from the time it left its first love till it is rejected, down to the end. He takes up churches which were exhibitions of a particular state. But Christians were taught to be constantly waiting; when anything happened He put the thing during the life of the person in the parable; so, when it is churches, He takes the churches of that time, but does not say a word that would allow the thought that the Lord was not coming at any moment. People talk of events, but that is confounding the thought of God's government with the Lord's coming for His saints.

When I have my individual salvation settled, I get the teaching of the New Testament as to the government of this world. See Deuteronomy 32 - "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance . . . he

set the bounds of the people . . . for the Lord's portion is his people." When I come to the government of the world the Jews are the centre; afterwards, I get the Beast, Antichrist, Babylon and so on, but that is connected with the government of this world, and there I get events; but as regards Christians, God's thought was to conform them to the image of His Son; to take poor sinners and put them in the glory with His Son; that has nothing to do with events. We have two things - He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ, that is now; but we are to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Besides, there is the government of this world which Christ's appearing will close, but that has to do with promise and prophecy, very interesting in its place; but His coming has nothing to do with prophecy. You get away from all that, and have the consciousness that you are to be waiting for Christ. Any moment He may take us and put us into the glory with Himself, that the angels may look upon us and see such ones as Mary Magdalene, the poor woman that had the seven devils, the woman in the city that was a sinner, and the thief on the cross, in the same glory as the Son of God. The Christian has got into his place; he is a saved person, the Holy Ghost dwells in him, and he is looking for the Lord's second coming. Take Philippians 3; I quote texts that are connected with the thoughts and feelings of the Christian: "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour . . . change our vile body," etc.; that is what I am waiting for.

If I look at the Book of Revelation, first at the beginning and then at the end - I do not look at the prophetic part of it. Before John commences that part you get the thoughts and feelings of the saints - the church. "From Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness," &c., that is upon earth - he skips over the present time, "Unto him that loveth us, and washed us," that is our place. It is "Him that loveth us." Just as if a great general was passing by, and his wife were watching, she would not say, "that is a great general," but "that is my husband." Just so here, He is the "Prince of the kings of the earth," but we say, "Unto Him that loveth us." Then Revelation 22, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel . . . I am the root and the offspring of David," because it is connected with promise there; "and the bright and Morning Star," that is not the kingdom, but the hope of the church.

You get in the address to Thyatira, "I will give him the morning star." When Christ comes as the "Sun of Righteousness" will be the day when every eye shall see Him, that is His appearing, but that is not the Star. The morning star is not seen when the sun is up, but those that are watching in the night, they see the morning star, it belongs to them.

We have the word of prophecy made sure. (2 Peter 1:19.) Prophecy is God's candle brought to bear upon the world going on its way as fast as it can, the heavenly things lead you out from it: "Till the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." But there is another thing, the consciousness of my association with Christ, He is coming to take me up. He is "the bright and morning Star," and the moment He reveals Himself in this character, as the "bright and morning Star," He awakens the desire of the bride, and you get the whole character of the Christian walk. "And the Spirit and the bride" - those that have entered into the consciousness of their relationship with Christ - He is for them the "bright and morning Star;" then, "let him that heareth say, Come" - let them join in saying it, and then the Gospel, if you have the water you say, come and drink, "let him that is athirst come;" then it goes out to the world, "and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

I get the whole course of Christian affection. 1st Christ, He is the Bright and Morning Star; 2nd, the desire to be with Him, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come;" 3rd, those that are His, "let him that heareth say,

Come," and then 4th, "whosoever will, let him take."

Notice the way the word of God brings the coming of the Lord before the heart in these addresses. First they are called back to what they were at the beginning - that is one way of judging what we are; but the moment you come to Thyatira, you get the kingdom, and the words "hold fast till I come." In Sardis it is, "I will come on thee as a thief," He treats them as the world, because they are so. To Philadelphia He says, "thou hast kept my word hast not denied my name; then, "behold, I come quickly." What was it that brought in the ruin of the church? Losing the doctrine of the Lord's coming. "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;" not that He will not come, but, "My lord delayeth his coming" (he did not expect him) "And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants" (this is hierarchical power joined to the world at the end), his portion is appointed with the hypocrites.

I just say a few words on the verses we have read. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning," &c., that is your character as Christians, you are to be like people that are waiting, the Master of the house has gone to a wedding, you do not know what time he will return. Death is not my lord; Christ is my Lord; "blessed are those servants whom their lord, when he cometh, shall find watching." "Watching," those are the people that are blessed when Christ comes - the affections of the bride - they are watching for the Lord. If a person says some Turk or Russian is come over, I do not care about that, but how different with a mother that is watching for her son not knowing what moment he may come.

"Blessed are those servants," etc., their character is "like unto men that wait." Mark the consequence, it is most blessed, Christ has become a man and taken the form of a servant, He never gives it up - it is a figure of course; being a Servant, now He serves us, washing our feet, but in heaven He will be our servant to minister all blessing and joy. As I have so often said, Selfishness likes to be served, love likes to serve. Just like a mother with a sick child, she will not let any one else attend to it, her heart is there. You must have your lights burning, etc., that is the character you should have. Christ says, when I get you at home, I shall make you sit down to meat. It is a figure; I will spread the table in heaven for you if I find you watching.

You get now another thing connected with His coming. "Who then is that faithful and wise steward . . . blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." "So doing" - we serve while He is away. As to the character of the Christian, he is waiting for Christ; then the affections of Christ come out, He gives him all the blessing - "Of a truth I say unto you that he will make him ruler over all that he hath." There it is the ruling in the kingdom. You have the two things that belong to us; the blessedness of being with Christ, which is far the highest, and we are to reign with Him. Even there I get the character of Christians, they are to be as men that wait till their Lord shall return, then when Christ has everything His own way, He makes them to sit down to meat and comes forth and serves them. Next every man receives his own reward according to his own labour, that is, He makes us rulers, &c., "If we suffer we shall also reign with him." (2 Tim. 2:12.) Thus what the Spirit of God puts before us as the hope, is that Christ Himself will come and bring us into this - the fruit of God's own love, with the constant expression of it on the way in the intimacy of friendship. Like what you get in Luke's account of the transfiguration you have Moses and Elias talking intimately while the disciples are frightened at the cloud; it was the witness of the presence of God: it was there where God had revealed Himself to Israel. The disciples fear while they are in the glory; it is the kingdom part of it; the disciples saw it, they went into it - Moses and Elias are in the same glory with Christ, but the voice is heard saying, "This is my beloved Son." For us there is a better thing still, the Father's house.

We are called to wait for the blessed Lord Himself; He has loved us and given Himself for us, and the heart of the Christian is set upon it - we wait to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to be for ever with the Lord. Now I only ask, Suppose He was to come to-night, would your souls find your joy at His coming? Are your hearts set upon Him in the midst of a world that has rejected Him? The whole of Christendom is eating and drinking, etc.; but are you filled with the joy that Christ will meet you as men that wait? Are you watching for Christ? Christ is waiting at the right hand of God, and His delight and joy is this, that He will take His people to be with Him for ever.

The Lord only give you in truth of heart so to know Christ and delight in Him, that your hearts may be waiting for Him and watching for Him - the joy and hope of your souls. There is one thing that is a comfort to me, and that is, that I believe all who are His will be led to look for Him before He actually comes. May He keep us, then, waiting for Him. J. N. D.

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