

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 31, Apocalyptic Discourse in Jerusalem, Luke 21:5-38

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This is Dr. Daniel K. Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 31, Apocalyptic Discourse in Jerusalem, Luke 21:5-38.

Welcome back to the Biblical eLearning [BeL] lecture series on the Gospel of Luke.

In a previous lecture, we looked at Jesus. Jesus was already in Jerusalem, and he had this exchange with the officials. As you may recall from that particular lecture, he was asked several questions, and he provided answers so they were not able to incriminate him.

Questions such as for by what authority and who gave you the authority to be able to perform your ministry? Questions on whether we should pay taxes to Caesar or not? Questions like resurrection: If seven brothers stay with one woman whom the first one marries, whose wife will that be on the resurrection? Then, Jesus goes on to clarify what the resurrection will be like and ends by cautioning his disciples against any tendency to emulate the lifestyle of scribes. There, in that particular session, Jesus mentions that the scribes like to devour widows. At the end of that lecture, I mentioned that Jesus was going to use the mention of widows, and Luke was going to use the mention of widows as a segue to get into something else that involved a widow in the temple.

So, remember, from the very time Jesus made a triumphant entry and came to Jerusalem, his ministry was going to be teaching ministry based in the temple. So, Jesus is still in the temple, and he will make observations there. And let's read from here in chapter 21, verses 1 to 4. And I read from the ESV.

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gift into the offering box. And he saw a poor widow put in small copper coins. And he said, truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.

They all contributed out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on. So, that particular reference to the scribes taking advantage of widows provides a segue in which Jesus observes something in the parable. Now, in this particular session, one should imagine Jesus in Jerusalem not interviewing anyone and not anyone asking him direct questions, but seeing what is going on as people put money in the offering and beginning to actually observe what is going on.

He began to observe that as some rich people came in, they gave more money. He, being Jesus, seemed to know what they had and their motives for doing that. He was able to discern that the rich people were giving some of what they had.

The woman would give all of what she had. Take a step back and think about what Luke has been telling us about Jesus and his engagement with the rich. Knowing very well that Luke was writing to Theophilus, an aristocrat to whom he referred to as Sir Theophilus, a very, very prominent figure who by all accounts is likely to have a means.

Luke, in his gospel, continuously reminds the reader that the kingdom of God comprises people who are rich, who are poor, who are sick, who are marginalized, and all people made in the image and likeness of God are participants in God's kingdom. Here, in this account, the widow becomes a model for good discipleship. Jesus is, in effect, in the temple observing this is saying that Luke at what the rich is doing and Luke at how the poor widow is doing.

Luke is doing something noteworthy here. He referred to the woman as a widow who, by social standing at the time, is likely to be poor. A woman's livelihood is dependent on the man or the husband in her life.

She had lost her husband. Luke qualifies further that she is poor. She has no means.

So, she had double things going on against her. She is a wanting or, if you like, more or less a helpless woman in the sense of the financial resources she may have. This poor should also remind us of Luke's interest in the poor.

Luke reminds us that God will provide for the poor and God is interested in the poor. In this account, Luke is not trying to suggest to us that the rich people were doing that badly by giving us some of what they had. No, that's not the point here.

The point is that the widow should be a model in terms of generosity. She was able to give more. By no means is he suggesting that when you go to the offering basket, you should give all that you have.

No, he is saying that a good model of discipleship is being shown by this particular woman. The emphasis, then, should be seen in terms of proportion. For example, if a millionaire came to the offering basket and gave 100,000 US dollars, that would be a lot of money in terms of monetary value.

If a poor person came to the offering basket and all they had back from home and in their pocket at the time was 10 dollars, and they gave that 10 dollars, in terms of monetary value, that was a lower denominational value in terms of currency. Jesus is not negating the value of a 100,000 dollar equivalent as a higher monetary value. But

he is saying that proportionately in terms of generosity, generosity comes in terms of the proportion one gives and the attitude in which one gives.

In fact, the motive and attitude is what God drives: how generous we become or not become. The motive and the attitude are what will make one give to get back or give to let go. Here, the woman is being shown as giving all that she has to the offering basket, and Jesus said her motive, her attitude, and her generosity surpass that of the rich ones in terms of proportion.

That does not mean that if, for example, she puts 10 dollars in, her 10 dollars suddenly becomes more than, for example, someone who puts in 100,000 dollars. No, that is not the point. The point is that proportionately, she had given all, and some may have given 5 percent, 2 percent, 3 percent, 2 percent, whatever you will name it.

All this playing out in the temple spells out one more occasion in which Jesus is actually showing the desire to see that we can learn, even if we are fearful of ourselves, from those who are marginalized and those who have fewer means in society. That is not again saying that the rich will have no place in the kingdom of God, or that is in no way of Luke suggesting that the wealthy cannot be true Christ followers. No, Luke's teaching on riches and poverty, perhaps I should summarize here before I go on with the apocalyptic discourse in 21. Luke's discourse is more on poverty and riches.

Luke's point is the rich, if they depend heavily on their riches, will find it difficult to find their place in the kingdom of God, where self-giving, generosity, and service are the norm. But the rich can be in the kingdom of God. In other words, he even used Jesus' example of if it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle because, for God, it is possible.

It doesn't mean the rich could be out of it. No, Jesus uses, Luke uses that excuse me, to challenge Theophilus as an affluent person, an influential figure, to be able to see how he can bring his place into kingdom service. On the other hand, with regard to the poor, Jesus by no means suggests that poverty means piety.

No, poverty is not piety. But the poor, the marginalized who are social rejects, are shown in Luke to be those whom God accepts, and God embraces, and occasionally, the poor are able to exhibit qualities of service and generosity that Luke will indicate in the ministry of Jesus to be noteworthy. I do not want to go the far extreme, as I once shared with a fellow scholar in one of our society meetings as I challenged him to say when I read his works on poverty, I begin to feel as though he thinks poverty theology is pietistic.

To which he told me, well, sometimes it is what one is reacting to, isn't it? That is true. That is not Luke's point, though. Luke, having nailed out clearly the widow as a model of giving, now goes straight into the rest of 21 chapter 21 to show some predictions Jesus will make as he comes to the end of his ministry.

Here, it is almost a monologue because we don't find Jesus interacting with people, but he will give one pronouncement after the other to talk about the doom and the gloom of the days ahead. Mind you, some of the things he will say about Jerusalem have already been fulfilled. The book was written in the 80s, and Jerusalem was destroyed in the 70s.

So, let's turn to chapter 21, verse 5, and begin to look at some of the predictions that Jesus will be making. First, we look at the predictions of the temple from verses 5 to 8, and I read. And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, as for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

And they asked him, teacher, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place? And he said, see that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name saying, I am he, and the time is at hand. Do not go after them. You notice from verse 5 that it is beholding; people were beholding what is going on in the temple, and that is what is going to prompt this.

As you can see on the screen, one of the things that Herod the Great did during his reign was refurbish the temple. He did a very, very massive job, and you see the gold columns and the beautiful columns, the white stones that are all set in place, and the temple was very, very beautiful. And it is in no doubt that Luke suggests to us that people were admiring what is going on in the temple.

In fact, the Jewish historian Josephus, who was once a general in his homeland and spent most of his life in Rome, writes about the temple as follows. In Josephus' words, Josephus writes, accordingly, in the fifteenth year of his reign, Herod rebuilt the temple and encompassed a piece of land about it with a wall, which land was twice as large as that before enclosed. The spans he laid out upon it were vastly large also, and the riches about it were unspeakable, a sign of which you have in the great cloisters that were erected about the temple and the citadel which was on its north side.

The cloisters he built from the foundation, but the citadel he repaired at a vast expense. Nor was it other than a royal palace, which he called Antonium, in harmony of Antony. Now, if you go back here and you see what I was showing you, Herod's temple is measured to be 360,000 square feet and the size of nine football fields in the United States.

Herod did a massive job, and what we find in the teachings of Jesus here is that people admire what is going on. Their admiration of the temple is what will prompt the prediction about his future. Jesus, as I said in a previous lecture, predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, which the Roman army led by Titus would be able to carry out.

Jesus beyond the temple also begins to talk about something he is doing and those who come after him. So far he has been spending a lot of time teaching in the temple like a teacher, a prophet, or a philosopher. But now he announces to the audience in the temple that they should be careful about those who come to say I am he, namely the Messiah.

Those who claim to be prophets should be careful about those false teachers and not follow them. He goes on quickly to announce other forms of predictions and the need for readiness. From verses 9 to 11, when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place.

But the end will not be at once, he said. Then he said to them, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and, in various places, famine and pestilence, and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

Jesus is, in effect, telling the audience that they should be aware that the end is not going to be that easy and great. People will panic, and people will be in fear as there will be wars and all kinds of revolutions, nations rising against nations, and earthly catastrophes in terms of earthquakes, famine, and plagues taking place. It's almost like it's going to be doom.

Chapter 21 is like that. As Jesus predicted the future, he went on to remind the disciples that they should also remember that there would be persecution. He said, that before all this, they should know that the end is not here yet.

Because the disciples should know that they will be persecuted, they will be delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. Verse 13, this will be your opportunity to bear witness.

Settle it, therefore, in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and a wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake, but not a hair of your head will perish.

By your endurance, you will gain your life. Jesus also predicted that some of the things we will see in the book of Acts will cause the disciples to be persecuted in the days ahead. Now, towards the end of the gospel of Luke and towards the end of Jesus himself crucifixion, he tried to prepare them ahead of time by predicting that they may be brought even before some pagan leaders, but they should not worry about what to say.

He will give them the mouth and the wisdom he said, and this protection will be upon them, but they should also be aware that some will die for their lives. As we will know, some of the apostles will suffer martyrdom. They will die as Jesus predicted. Persecution will be part of the work they will be doing.

But one of the things that is striking here is how Jesus reminds them that even people in their household will be there to betray them. They should be aware of that, and yet assure them that they should not worry because he will supply what they need in every given circumstance, even though he is not giving them false hope that some will still perish. Jesus goes on to say that if the destruction of the temple is not enough, as if the cosmic catastrophe will not be enough, and as if the predictions of the persecution for the disciples will not be enough, they should be aware that Jerusalem will come under severe judgment.

Luke writes in the words of Jesus, but when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you know that the solution has come near. Then, know that the solution has come near. Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out of the country enter it for these days of vengeance to fulfill all that is written.

Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days, for there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against the people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. Basically, Jesus is, in effect, pointing out that the end of the city is near the city will be besieged.

Inhabitants may flee to safety on the hills or in the mountains. Woe to women who are pregnant and nursing because that time will be very difficult. People will fall. Some will fall by the sword, and some will be held captives, and Gentiles will be responsible for bringing the nation or the city under this condition.

In Luke 21, Jesus is, in effect, predicting events of AD 70 or 70 CE when the Romans will come and deal a blow to Jerusalem and reduce that city that important city, the temple, the place where Jesus stands to teach now and reduce it to rubble. He predicts that this will happen, and what Luke is doing in his writing is to get his audience to realize that Jesus was a prophet who knew this and predicted it ahead of

time before they happened. Luke continues, and perhaps before I read further on the coming of the Son of Man, let me bring out what Luke Timothy Johnson says about events.

Luke Timothy Johnson says in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Luke is certainly circumspect in his description so much so that one is not compelled to accept that the city had already fallen. For most of Luke's readers, however, the fact that these events had occurred in a way consistent with the words of Jesus must have had a powerful impact. In the first place, it demonstrated graphically how the rejection of the prophet did lead to the rejection of the rejecters and thus validated Jesus' prophetic claim.

In the second place, it lent more weight to the predictions concerning the coming of the Son of Man, and as far as that prediction of the coming of the Son of Man is concerned, Jesus says there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars and on the earth the stress of nations in perplexity because of the rolling of the sea and the waves. People faint with fear and foreboding of what is coming in the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken, and then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now, when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

As regards the coming of the Son of Man, Luke is, in effect, saying this: there will be signs in the solar system that people could observe, and that in itself will induce anxiety and fear that is associated with the cosmic catastrophe that they will be seeing. They should know that the Son of Man will come, and the Son of Man will come with power and great glory. Jesus assures them that the Son of Man will come and the Son of Man will be on their side.

He, therefore, calls the disciples to be vigilant. They should be vigilant because their redemption, their salvation, their deliverance, and their liberation are here. God will save his people.

And then he goes on to give a very, very sketchy parable at the end. He told the parable, look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they come out and leave, you see yourselves and know that summer is already near.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will not pass away.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Now you notice this parable of the fig trees is very simple here. Jesus is, in effect, saying that it is natural to observe how the trees change with the weather.

Just by lessons of observation, one is able to know the seasons and the times. It is natural to observe how the seasons and the times change. When they see those signs unfolding, they must be aware that the kingdom of God is near.

But then he makes a profound statement. Jesus mentions that the kingdom of God will come to pass before this generation will pass away, which in itself raises questions about people asking, what does this generation refer to? This generation is a controversial issue because if we understand the nature of this generation, then one may ask, did Jesus expect the end to come earlier? When are those events unfolding? To whom do they apply? Scholars are in the field of conjecture as to the exact, or I should put it this way, the exactness of what this generation refers to. But four possible readings have been supplied.

One is the reading that says this generation refers to Jesus' own contemporaries. I think Fitzmyer does a good job of outlining them and trying to elaborate further on how much speculation or guesswork we have tried to put forward. A second view says that this generation refers to Jewish people and wherever they are.

A third view says this generation refers to humanity in general, which by far is the weakest of all the views because this generation will refer to people. We are talking about this generation in terms of time frame. So, you cannot just say this generation refers to all people, and they're living there.

That's a very weak view. Others have been more hesitant to pin to a particular group of people and leave the statement of Jesus for what it is and say that perhaps we can read this generation to be the generation that will see the signs that are predicted earlier on. If you belong to a generation that begins to see those signs unfolding, then Jesus said you should know that it is in your time that these things are likely to come to pass.

Hence, the call for vigilance. The call for vigilance Jesus tries to any time he pronounces doom to his disciples as if a father to say, look, things are going to be really, really bad, but children come, come, come, let me tell you something. It shall be okay.

So, Jesus calls them to be watchful and rest assured about what God is doing and not be taken by surprise. He says 34 to 38, but watch yourself. Lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life.

That day come upon you suddenly like a trap for it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth, but stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man. And having said this, I call them to readiness, to vigilance. He goes on, verse 37, to say, Luke writes, every day he was teaching in the temple, and at

night, he went out to lodge on the Mount of Olives, and early in the morning, all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

Five things quickly as I try to wrap up the discussion or the lecture on chapter 21. Jesus was wrapping up predictions about what events were coming so that the disciples and the audience in the temple would be ready. He highlighted that they needed to be watchful. The language Luke uses and qualifies as part of being watchful is being sober, sane, clear-minded, not being like an intoxicant, or not somebody who is inebriated.

Be clear-headed. And if you are going to be clear-headed, try also to be vigilant in terms of staying awake. Stay awake so as to be able to gather the strength to flee and ask that God may grant you that grace to stand.

Luke goes on to suggest to us that Jesus' ministry in the temple was not a one-day event. He would do that; he would go back to the olives and come back in the morning, and people would come and spend some time with him. Jesus has given very, very grim, grim, grim predictions about the end of things to come.

Touching on Jerusalem, cosmic affairs, and all that. But you know what he doesn't do in 21 is to remind the disciples again that his passion is near. Events are just wrapping up.

In fact, the teaching ministry is going to be seizing. They are going to have to start organizing themselves for the Passover feast. And the things that we know today and refer to as the Passion Week will start unfolding.

At the end of the temple ministry, Jesus has made the audience fully aware that the end times will be doom time. His disciples should not be surprised, but God will be there for them. In persecution, in suffering, and in hard times, they should do their part to be watchful.

To be vigilant, to stay awake, to gather strength when necessary to flee. Because the kingdom of God comes, the rule of God comes. But the rule of God does not mean disciples would not suffer in the world of mankind.

In the cosmos marred with sin and destruction. Perhaps you're wondering, are we in the end time or not? I don't know. But what I know from Luke 21 is Jesus says, be ready.

And I should be ready. And while he was teaching this and as Luke was writing this, what Luke is not telling us is that Jesus is also and is near. Today, may I encourage you as you think about Luke 21, to think about all the predictions that Jesus gave and

ask yourself, am I ready? Sometimes, I'm asked, what is your eschatology? And I like to say my eschatology is this.

My personal eschatology is one day, I will die. My cosmic eschatology is if I don't die before Christ comes, that will be the end. But what is my posture? That is the cross of the matter.

And I hope you adopt the posture as well. My posture is I should be ready for the fact that the end of my life in personal eschatology could be today. Or the coming of Christ could be today.

So, may I ask, are you ready if the Son of Man comes today? Or if the end of your life is today? I don't have control over the future. I entrust my life and my future to God because he who holds the future is the one who determines how things will unfold.

That trust also requires me to be ever vigilant and watchful, conducting myself as if at, any day, the end will come. May God continue to inspire you and me as we think about these predictions of Jesus and the end of our lives or the end of the world as we know it. And I pray that you continue this learning experience with us as we get to the next phase and go through Jesus' difficult time.

The one who has taught us so much in the past few lectures in Jerusalem. Going to go through some very, very painful moments. And you would ask, why should he do this? And I would answer, he would do this for you and for me.

Thank you.

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