

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Luke's Gospel (21:1-24)

Widow's mites & destruction of Jerusalem

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

We are going to consider Luke 21:1-24. This section covers three separate issues. The first highlights commitment regarding a widow's donation in support of the temple at Jerusalem. The second concerns prophecy regarding the destruction of the temple which occurred approximately 40 years after the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. It also involved the destruction of most of the city as well. The third section is a far-ranging prophecy going beyond the soon coming destruction of the temple and the city. It mainly involves the persecution of believers.

Scriptures quoted will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

The widow's donation, vv. 1-4

Let us read these four verses,

“Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.””

At the end of chapter 20, the Lord had just finished warning the people and the disciples about the scribes and their behaviour. The last verse shows how they preyed on widows robbing them of their homes. Now the Lord turns from warning the people about the unscrupulous scribes to observe the actions of a widow and others as they put gifts into the Temple treasury. Many rich people were there donating a gift from the abundance of their riches. This contrasted sharply with the widow who was extremely poverty stricken yet her devotion to God led her to put into the treasury all the money that she had.

Poverty in this world is contrasted with the riches of glory as found in Anna Dober's (1713-1739) hymn,

Poor and feeble though we be,
Saviour, we belong to Thee;
Thine we are, Thou Son of God,
Thine, the purchase of Thy blood.

Boundless wisdom, power divine,
Love unspeakable, are Thine;
Praise by all to Thee be given,
Son of God, and Heir of Heaven!

Now in Israel the law system demanded tithes, that is a tenth of a person's income, which could be in money or goods. The amount of money the widow gave was two small copper coins. In the King James Authorised Version, it states, "two mites." A mite was the equivalent of one eighth of an old penny, in predecimalization coinage. Therefore, two mites equalled a coin called a 'farthing' or a quarter of an old penny. The Lord Jesus teaches that the widow has put in more than the rich people. Why? Because the widow put in all that she had and the rich only put in what was probably a fraction of their income. This situation highlights dependence upon God. The widow had nothing to hold on to and could only look to God to provide. It also shows the widow's devotion to and confidence in a God who will meet all her needs.

In a different setting the Lord Jesus made this remark regarding the poor.

"For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them" (Mark 14:7).

This has been true for all time, there have always been poor people. Today, the definition of poor is different in our country (UK) to that which is found in many other countries and to my own situation when I was a lad. However, the opportunity to help those who are in need is still relevant and a challenge for all of us who are more affluent in terms of disposable income.

As we conclude talking about the widow and her generous donation to the temple fund. I am reminded of a radio talk which I did in 2006. The title is "What can I do? - The Widow's two mites", talk number T0434. After this broadcast you may be interested in accessing the 'Truth for Today' website and read this radio talk. A reminder of the website, it is – www.truthfortoday.org.uk
There are no spaces in the website name.

It was during the same year (2006) that my wife and I visited Cambridge and while looking round the city we came across a small shop selling old coins. They had a small copper coin in the window, the widow's mite. So, we entered the shop and purchased a coin as a memento of the time spent writing the above mentioned radio talk.

Destruction coming, vv. 5-6

Let us read these two verses,

"And as he spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, He said, "As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down"" (KJV translation).

As the Lord made his observations of the rich and the widow giving their respective donations in support of the temple, others were more occupied with the ornate structure and the sacrificial gifts. In our own country, cathedrals and some churches are now visitor attractions and you either have to pay to enter and look round or you are expected to make a donation as you go through the main doors. As part of the sightseeing tour, there is usually a book/gift shop and a café to raise more money for the upkeep of the fabric of the building, the day to day maintenance. There is no doubt that the buildings are a marvel of construction, especially considering that all was done by hand without modern equipment or scaffolding hundreds of years ago.

However, the Lord Jesus moves the attention away from the grand temple structure to a prophetic reality that not one stone would be left upon another. In other words, the magnificent temple buildings were going to be destroyed. The destruction was not confined to the temple but most of the city of Jerusalem suffered the same fate.

History records the destruction by Titus, a Roman General, as part of the suppression of the Jews for their rebellion against the authority of Rome. The Jews had rebelled in AD 66 but after four

years the rebellion was quashed and more than a million Jewish people died at the hands of Titus and his army (as per Josephus, Jewish historian).

If we turn to John chapter 4 and consider verses 20-24,

““Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.””

Here the Lord Jesus in His conversation with the Samaritan woman reveals how there is to be a dramatic change regarding worship. It was not to be on a mountain in Samaria, not in Jerusalem and not associated with magnificent ornate buildings. Not the building but the person was to be worshipped of God the Father. It was not physical rituals but a spiritual outpouring of worship from the heart. This links with what the Lord has said about the destruction of the temple.

But when, v.7?

The Lord’s prophetic remarks caught the attention of the disciples and they asked the Lord, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”

We can only imagine the shock of the disciples to hear the Lord speak in this way. This was a structure many years in building and it would seem to the disciples as a fixture that would last forever. How could it possibly fall victim to some future destruction? Was it not God’s house? We know that the Lord had already shown that the religious leaders had moved away from what God intended and had turned it into a commercial enterprise. Let us quote from Mark 11:17,

“And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.””

This was a quotation from the prophet Isaiah (56:7) which states,

“For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

The destruction in AD70 could be considered a foretaste of future events which the Lord Jesus now proceeds to unfold to His disciples.

General outline of troubles, vv.8-11

Let us read these verses,

“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. And 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.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.””

It is interesting to note that the Lord opens His discussion about future events with a warning, “See that you are not led astray.” There is a wonderful verse, 2 Timothy 2:15, which every serious

mindful Christian needs to be guided by in their study of Scripture. Let us just remind ourselves of the verse in full,

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

Over my lifetime there have been deceivers who have claimed to be ‘Jesus’ and led people astray but in the end they either perished or were shown to be false. There have also been many predictions about the end of the world, but these dates have also come and gone. The Lord warns His people not to go after them and, in any case, this is not the end times.

The Lord proceeds to speak of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. We have a kind of pestilence which started in 2020 called Covid-19. It is not until we read of terrors and great signs in heaven that we might start to think that the Lord is not really speaking to Christians. Christians do not look for terrors and great signs in heaven; we are waiting for the Saviour coming at the Rapture. The Rapture is the event that takes the church, dead and living believers, out from the earth to be with Christ in glory. The Lord is speaking to the disciples and the teaching is directed to Israel. There will be difficult days ahead after the church is gone. This is the key to understanding these verses in Luke 21. We may well experience some of the things the Lord is mentioning in the vv.8-11, but the full development of these awful times will be after the Rapture.

[This is not to say that Christians will have an easy time. In fact, it is just the opposite. There are all kinds of problems believers go through and, in many situations, Christians attract additional heartache from hostile individuals, communities and even governments that are anti-Christian.](#)

What is the Lord Jesus doing with this teaching as He moves from the temple destruction? He is outlining events that will have a specific application to the nation of Israel. AD70 was a kind of judgment which resulted in the nation of Israel being removed from the land for many hundreds of years. This judgment was because of unbelief and their rejection of their Messiah. But the main thrust of the message was the future prophecy of intense persecution for the nation when they eventually return, in unbelief, to their promised land.

Confidence in the middle of troubles, vv.12-19

Let us now read these verses,

“But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. 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 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 they will 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 lives.”

These verses outline what will happen before the physical events mentioned in earlier verses take place. Verses 12-15 have an echo of what happened in the early days of the Church as described for us in the early chapters of Acts. Peter, John, Stephen and eventually Paul are prime examples of this type of persecution. Stephen is a particularly good example of how he was enabled to speak before the Sanhedrim, the supreme Jewish religious court. When Stephen is first brought before them, they looked at him and

“All who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).

Stephen was then allowed to speak before the council outlining Jewish history without interruption until he concludes with,

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it” (Acts 7:51-53).

The charge Stephen levels at the religious leaders, is the betrayal and murder of God’s own Son, Jesus. At this point they become enraged and, casting Stephen out of the city, murder him by stoning.

The Lord expands upon His prophetic word by stating that even parents, relatives, and friends would be their betrayers and persecute them. Finally, they would be hated by everyone. This last statement has been the lot of the Jewish nation since they crucified the Lord Jesus. At some point in time most countries have persecuted the Jews either in their past or are still persecuting them today. Even today, in so called tolerant societies, anti-Semitic activity takes place and of course there are countries who are totally opposed to the existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East. We should remind ourselves that the Lord Jesus is making these prophetic announcements to God fearing believers, the disciples. The execution of these judgments will target the Lord’s believing people in a coming day and sadly the persecutors will be the unbelieving Jewish nation.

Stand firm, v. 19

As we consider verse 19, we will find this challenging. Let us read this verse,
“In your patience (or endurance) possess ye your souls” (KJV).

This is not the salvation of souls which depends upon our ability it is rather holding true to the confession already made. Your salvation is already secure in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ your Saviour, and it was so from the moment you accepted Him as Lord and Saviour. This salvation cannot be lost and does not need effort on my behalf for it to be maintained.

This is an exhortation to continue in the path of faith and hold, or make good, the commitment regarding their soul. We have just noted the trying times through which these future believers will experience every kind of opposition that might discourage them. Here the Lord gives advance warning to remain steadfast. The eternal blessing that they have cannot be lost. They are encouraged to remain true. This is true for believers of all time, in the past, now and in a future day.

Desolation upon Jerusalem, vv.20-24

These verses make a step change in the Lord’s prophecy for these believers. Again, this is beyond the destruction inflicted by Titus. Let us read these verses.

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfil 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 this 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 times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Up till now, there has been persecution but what is being indicated here is the destruction of this city Jerusalem. Along with the destruction of the city, there is great danger for the Lord’s people being destroyed. So, verse 21 gives the warning to flee Judea and the city and find refuge in the

mountains. For others who might think the city would be a safe place as they flee from the approaching armies they too are warned not to enter.

Here the Lord describes this destructive time as the 'days of vengeance'. We need to ask ourselves, on whom will this vengeance fall? To find an answer, we need to turn to the prophet Jeremiah, where we find this same expression. Jeremiah 46:10 states,

“That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge Himself on His foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.”

In chapter 46, God is taking vengeance on Egypt. He does not use His own people but the Babylonians. Jeremiah writes during the period of the last few kings of Judah up to the Babylonian captivity. God uses the Babylonians to judge and chastise Judah because they had turned away from the One true God. At the same time Egypt also comes under the judgment of God.

God's judgment is not haphazard; it is based on the behaviour of the nations or individuals and their response to God. It will be the same regarding the period of the Lord's prophecy in Luke 21. God will use the rebellion of the nations who come to destroy Jerusalem and God's people to execute judgment on the rebellious nations and preserve His people, His city and ultimately the land.

When John the Baptist gave the news of the coming Messiah, he warned that the people should prepare themselves. John's message in Luke 3:4-7 warns of the wrath or judgment to come, but it mainly was a call for the godly to be prepared for their Messiah. In the Lord's prophecy He points to wrath coming, the days of vengeance.

Verse 23 is an expression of sadness for those who are pregnant or with nursing infants because of the destruction that is going to fall on Jerusalem. This is graphically described in verse 24. Death, captivity, and the oppressors' boot crushing any remaining alive. God's judgment will be severe on His unbelieving people who for generations have rejected Jesus. Yes, they have suffered terribly down through the years and no doubt will continue to do so in that troubled land of Israel. But it will be nothing in comparison to what will happen in these end times as the nations make an attempt to crush, destroy and subdue Israel for one last time.

The widow who cast in the two small copper coins, an insignificant amount at the beginning of this chapter is the only bright and positive event in a chapter which, so far, has largely been devoted to destruction and failure. The widow represents the true godly remnant in a nation which had turned their back on the living God for their own religious rituals.

To end on a positive note, I would like to quote a hymn by John Newton (1725-1807).

When Israel by divine command,
The pathless desert trod,
They found throughout the barren land,
A sure resource in God.

A cloudy pillar marked the road,
And screened them from the heat;
From the hard rock the water flowed,
And manna was their meat.

Like them, we have a rest in view,
Secure from hostile powers:

Like them, we pass a desert too,
But Israel's God is ours.

His word a light before us spreads,
By which our path we see;
His love, a banner o'er our heads,
From harm preserves us free.

Jesus, the Bread of life, is given
To be our daily food;
Within us dwells that spring from heaven,
The Spirit of our God.

Lord, 'tis enough, we ask no more;
Thy grace around us pours
Its rich and unexhausted store,
And all its joy is ours.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Luke's Gospel, "Widow's mites, and destruction of Jerusalem", talk number T1194.

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