

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 16

Jesus' Teaching on the Last Days

Introduction

- Jesus' teaching focused primarily on the Kingdom of God – the kingdom rule that He was inaugurating through His ministry, snatching the keys of life and death from the great usurper and adversary, Satan
- Jesus also taught that the Kingdom of God was still in the future – He taught His disciples to pray: “Our Father ... your kingdom come!” – cf. Acts 1:6-8 – this was the messianic reign that had been prophesied and spoken about by the OT prophets, eg Isaiah in ch.9:6-7
- Jesus' life and ministry – the miracles of healing, the deliverance of people from satanic oppression and darkness, the teaching that set people free from the lies of Satan being perpetrated by the religious leaders of Jesus' day – all these were clear signs that God's kingdom was coming to earth
- Yet Jesus taught that many things had to happen before the final day when the old would be forever ushered out and the new forever ushered in – He taught these clearly so that His disciples would understand even though it wasn't taught in a way that would satisfy the curiosity of a modern person who expects to know everything about everything, complete with all the details and lists of events in precise time-frames – this is not the way Jesus taught – why? so that His people would continue to walk by faith and not by sight – needing to be totally dependent upon God – to know enough so that God's people aren't left in the dark (cf. Jesus' clear words about His own coming sufferings though only after the events did the disciples really grasp their meaning and significance), but not too much so that they aren't discouraged, filled with great fear, unable to carry on
- Jesus spoke often of the future – of heaven and hell – He did not try to be popular by just focusing on the “positive” and playing down the negative lest some of His followers choose to leave Him – nor was He a “doomsayer” who only focused the attention of His hearers on the terrible events to come – He was a Rabbi who taught the truth as the truth would throw light on to the pathway of God's people

and give understanding to their minds (Psalm 119:105,130) – He was an Encourager whose goal was to build up the trust and faith of God’s people, especially focusing on the fact that God was in total control as the Lord, the Sovereign Ruler, over all events and all powers, that He was working out His eternal plan of salvation bringing life and salvation to all peoples – His primary purpose was not condemnation or judgment but eternal life and salvation (John 3:17)

- So what were some of Jesus’ teaching concerning the coming events? See Luke 12:35-59; 14:7-24; 17:22-37; 21:5-38 (also 11:29-36)

Major themes

- The prophetic teachings of Jesus are inseparably linked with all prophetic passages in the Bible – some prophetic messages spoken through the OT prophets and great servants of God concerning the coming of the Messiah were fulfilled through Jesus’ first coming; other prophecies are being fulfilled, and some are yet to be fulfilled – it is very important that we do not read Jesus’ prophecies about the future in isolation from other passages about the end times elsewhere in the Bible – similarly we should read Jesus’ words as we study other prophetic passages in the NT, eg those found in the Revelation
- Prophecies are often related to “the Last Days,” that indefinite, extended period of time between the first coming of the Jesus and His second and final coming – sometimes this term is applied specifically to the very final hours of the Last Days – however, according to Heb.1:1 we are already in the Last Days
- The King (also called Master – Luke 12:35-36) has already come, and He will return – this is Jesus’ promise and the hope of all God’s true people (Col.1:5; Titus 2:13; 1 Thess.1:3) as they live in an alien world among people whose worldview and values are antithetical to the worldview and values of God and His kingdom – cf. in the world but not of the world John 17:16 – love not the world 1 John 2:15-16 – the world will hate you John 15:18-19 etc.)
- In between the first coming of the King and His return, God is preparing the way for His Son’s return – many things must happen before He can return – in that sense, His coming is not “imminent” as it won’t happen until all these things are fulfilled (cf. Jesus’ first coming took place after God had finished preparing the way – see Gal.4; cf. 1 Tim.6:14-16) – however, we may also say His coming is “imminent” if we interpret this word to mean that we don’t know when all these

things will take place because only God knows, therefore we must live daily eagerly awaiting our Lord's return (Luke 12:38), eagerly looking forward to being forever with the Lord (cf. Col.3:3-4)

- The King's return will be with great glory and power and will be witnessed by all (Luke 21:27)
 - For citizens of the kingdom, it is the Day that they have been waiting for (verse 28 = their day of redemption, cf. 1 Peter 1:5), a day of great favour (Luke 12:37-38), a day of fulfilled hope (Col.1:23; 1 Tim.1:1), a day of great celebration and gathering together with all the saints that have preceded them, to be followed by the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Rev.19) – it is also a day when the Master will give rewards to His servants (= His children) for their careful and faithful management of His property (Luke 12:42-43)
 - Whereas for those who have remained outside God's kingdom choosing to live under Satan's rule, the King's coming will be a day of unspeakable darkness and unending, irretrievable loss – the terrible Day of the LORD, a day when His wrath will be unleashed in judgment upon all sin and evil and the workers of evil – a day of retribution and justice, a day when God will separate the sheep and the goats (Matt.25:31-32)
- God has not published an exact time-table of future events with a list of dates with precise times for each coming event preceding Jesus' return:
 - To His intimate circle of friends and disciples, Jesus spoke clearly in a way they could understand – see Luke 17:24; 21:10ff, 29-33 (though we should not imagine that we will diligently listen to or believe the words of Jesus)
 - To the larger group, He spoke about the last days through His kingdom parables – Luke 11:29-32
- Preparing for the King's coming isn't through gazing up into the clouds and waiting for His coming – rather it is by working, serving, doing good to others, serving the needy, the little people (see Matt.25:31-46), proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom to the ends of the world (Mark 13:10; Matt.24:14) – watching and working – cf. Paul who proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom among the nations (Acts 28:31) while eagerly awaiting the return of the King – living with hope, waiting for the Blessed Hope (Titus 2:11ff)
- The days preceding the coming of the King will be dark and difficult – a day that Paul calls “the evil day” (Eph.5:6; 2 Tim.3:1ff) – a day of great suffering for God's

people – a day when the love of most Christians will become cold (Matt.24:12) – a day of great opposition from the forces of darkness against God’s people, when demonic hate will be unleashed against the light and all those who stand for the light (cf. John 16:33) – a day for which we need God’s Holy Spirit and help so that we will withstand all the terrible events – only through God’s help will His people be able to make it through – these events will include:

- Deception and apostasy (falling away) – Luke 17:23; 21:8
- Visible and terrifying changes in nature – changes on the earth – changes in the heavenly bodies – Luke 21:11,25
- Conflicts between peoples and nations – Luke 21:10
- Persecution of God’s people – Luke 21:12-19
- Destruction of cities and nations – Luke 21:10,20
- Division within families over Jesus – Luke 12:49-53; 17:34-35
- Jesus not only warned His people concerning the many troubles that will befall them but He also spoke about the many positive things and experiences that will take place leading up to His return: God’s people doing the will of the Father – His servants going out in obedience to the King’s command to invite people everywhere to come to the King’s banquet (Luke 14:15-24) – the Gospel will be preached among all the nations (Mark 13:10; Matt.24:14)
- God’s people must prepare for the coming of their King and Bridegroom:
 - Avoiding a life of careless ease and drunkenness (Luke 12:45-48; 17:26-30; 21:34-36; cf. Titus 2:12-13)
 - Getting dressed and remaining clothed and ready for the Master / King to return (Luke 12:35; cf. Matt.25:1-13; Rom.13:11-14)
 - Not clinging to this life but living for the world to come (Luke 17:33; cf. Col.3:1-4)
 - Staying alert waiting and watchful at all times (Luke 12:40; 21:36; cf. “eagerly awaiting”: Rom.8; 2 Tim.4:8; Heb.9:28)
 - Enduring to the end (Luke 21:19)
 - Not frightened by all the earth-shaking events taking place – rather looking up, standing tall while waiting for the day of salvation (Luke 21:28)
 - Not worrying beforehand what to say if handed over to the judges (Luke 21:14)
- We need to allow for more than one fulfilment of Jesus’ prophecies – some that took place in the lifetime of Jesus’ disciples and then a second fulfilment still to

take place (Luke 21:20ff) – we should avoid a totally futuristic approach to or interpretation of the prophetic passages in the Bible including in Jesus’ teaching, interpreting “prophecy” to mean only those events that will take place immediately before Jesus’ return (i.e. one minute to midnight!) – when God speaks through His servants the prophets, including His Son. concerning future things, all announcements of things to come have significance (i.e. a reminder or warning) *to the hearers* – cf. if all were futuristic, prophecies would be little more than information of interest about future things to satisfy people’s curiosity – that isn’t the way we should read and interpret Jesus’ teaching nor any part of God’s Word that refers to the “coming judgment” (forth-telling & foretelling) – God’s people in all ages need to be very careful lest their study of the end times from the Bible isn’t just a Christian form of gazing into a crystal ball to find out what will happen, an attempt by man to predict his future (especially for man’s own interests, not God’s, eg if it is still far off, then man thinks he can relax and take life easy) – Jesus’ teaching about the future is a word or message from God for the immediate present as much as it is a word for the future – it is a call to get involved in the present work of God’s kingdom as it is to get ready for the final culmination of all things

- The waiting period will be difficult – it will appear as if the world just goes on in a cyclical fashion as it has always gone (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-10) – at such moments the danger is that God’s people will give up waiting and in this way fall prey to their own despair and pessimism – Jesus gives certainty to all that is happening with His words – Luke 21:32 (*“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”*)

Conclusion

- Jesus very last conversation with His disciples included discussion concerning the coming of God’s kingdom – Acts 1: 6-8 – Jesus responded to the point without giving more information – rather He spoke about another prophecy which would be fulfilled within days of His ascension, viz. concerning the coming of the Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28-29), i.e. a prophecy that in its fulfilment would make all the difference in the world for their carrying out Jesus’ command to take the Good News to all nations/peoples – we God’s people living today need to hear and heed the very same message

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