

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

GAUDETE

Rejoice

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Roberto E. Rojas, Jr.



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Luke 21:25-36 ESV

Author and Date:

Matthew Levi the apostle around AD 50. This is the sending of John's disciples to the Christ and the Testimony of Jesus concerning John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35).

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples

- John the Baptist was imprisoned by King Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, about a year earlier for calling him to repent of taking Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (see Matthew 14:3-5; Mark 6:17-20; Luke 3:19-20).

³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

- John preached about the One who was coming (Matthew 3:10-12), but, because of his imprisonment, he now is beginning to doubt. No one is safe from doubt, or taking offense at Christ. The weakness of the flesh can cause all to question God's promises.

⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

- The disciples witness the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 35:4-6).
- Christ makes Himself known not only by His words, but by His deeds (see John 8:31; 13:35; James 2:18; Galatians 2:20). "[W]isdom is justified by her deeds" (Matthew 11:19).

⁵ "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

- "The poor" – These are not simply the financially poor, but the spiritually poor (Matthew 5:3). See also Psalm 51:19; and Isaiah 57:15; 66:1-2. They have not deserved to hear the Gospel, but Christ preaches it to them freely.

- Jesus proves Himself by His mighty works of healing (Matthew 8-9) and His proclamation of the Good News to the poor as the fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic prophecies (Isaiah 26:19; 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:18; 61:1-2). Furthermore, because of His incarnation, the human nature of Christ is capable of the divine works (*Genus Apotelesmaticum*). By these acts, Christ was recognized as the incarnate Son of God.

⁶ "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

- "Blessed" – Jesus' beatitude (see Matthew 5:3-12) promises peace and joy to John and anyone else who was not repelled by Him.
- "Offended" (Greek: *skandalisthe*) – The Greek says, "scandalized," which means to "stumble" or "cause to fall."
- "The Lord intimated that He was about to die, and by such a death as might be to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness." (Bernard of Cluny, SLSB, p. 174)
- "Men will continue to the end of time to take offense at Christ and His Church. Even Christians take offense at Christ when they fall away from Him because they are not willing to follow Him on the way of suffering. Matthew 24:10-11: 'Then shall many be offended... And many false prophets shall

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rise and shall deceive many.' Matthew 13:21: 'When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended.' For this reason, Christ so earnestly warns: 'Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me,' etc. (Matthew 11:6, 25, 26)" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:563).

- See Isaiah 8:14 and Romans 1:21.

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

- Jesus asks three rhetorical questions which anticipate a negative response in verses 7-9: 1) A reed shaken by the wind? 2) A man dressed in soft clothing? 3) A prophet? Jesus established who He was. Now, He is establishing who John is. Each rhetorical question clarifies John's purpose described in Malachi 3:1 (see Matthew 11:10).
- "a reed shaken in the wind" – This is an analogy for someone changes position with every shift in public opinion.

⁸ "What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

- John wore rough clothing: camel's hair and a leather belt (see Matthew 3:4). He did not attract people by his position, association, title, or location. His preaching drew people out to the wilderness by the Word.

⁹ "What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

- Jesus placed John the Baptist above all the other prophets because he was God's chosen messenger, prophesied from the Old Testament, to prepare the way for the Lord. He played a unique role in God's plan of salvation. The prophets of old saw the Messiah by faith, but John points to the physical presence of the Messiah and says, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

- "John the Baptist is not numbered among those who foretold coming events; rather it was his calling and duty to identify the Messiah personally, face to face." (Martin Luther, *Luther's House Postils: Third Sunday in Advent: Second Sermon*–1533)

¹⁰ "This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."

- "I" – In this prophecy of Malachi 3:1, Christ, the Son of God, now speaks these words in the first person singular: "Behold, I send...before me." The One who promised to send John is now standing before them.

¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

- "...This Gospel lesson deals with two of the most important men who have ever lived on earth; namely, about Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man—our Savior and Messiah. Then about John the angel [messenger] who prepared the way for Christ" (Johann Gerhard, *Postilla* 1:25).
- Christ speaks well of John in four ways: he was not a hypocrite (a moveable reed), not vain (his clothing), his ministry (forerunner of the Christ), and his birth (greatest man born of a woman).
- John is not an angel, or divine. He is the greatest man born of a woman. John was the last prophet under the old covenant. John proclaimed Christ's first Advent, baptized Him, and even died a martyr preparing the way for Jesus. Jesus is "the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven" who is greater than John. Jesus was not merely born of a woman, but of a virgin.
- "Least" (Greek: *mikroteros*) – In Greek it is literally "the lesser," a comparative, not a superlative. The "lesser" one points to Jesus Himself. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."



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