

LESSON 229

TIMES OF JUDGMENT

Related Scripture: Jeremiah 32:16-32

KEY VERSE: "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."
—II Corinthians 4:18.

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 33:13-22;
Isaiah 31:1-3; Jeremiah 21:8-10

Introduction:

Man is accountable to his Creator. This is a solemn thought which sinners try to avoid. All sorts of humanistic, materialistic, evolutionary, and atheistic theories are resorted to in vain attempts to escape moral responsibility. But Biblical truth remains: in clear distinction from lower animals, man was created with a free moral sense in the image of God, and must answer to God for his moral decisions.

Divine judgment is not only eschatological. Certainly we must not forget the plain teaching of God's word that there will be a future day of eternal judgment, when all the wrongs of human history will be brought to light and God will render to every man according to his deeds. (Ro. 2:6.) But there are also temporal judgments of God manifested in history and in current events—judgments upon nations and upon individual souls.

Eternal judgment upon sinners will be manifestly perfect and unmixed with mercy. God's temporal judgments, however, appear to man as intermittent and partial, being mingled with mercy in patterns that only the eye of faith can discern.

Such is the innate depravity of human nature that sinners generally respond to divine mercy with presumption rather than faith, and to divine judgment with rebellion rather than repentance. God's word demands a more intelligent response to His temporal dealings if we would fare well in His eternal judgment.

Our present scripture lesson may be outlined as follows:

1. Judgment Averted, Psalm 33:13-22
 - a. Vantage vision, 13-15
 - b. Vain violence, 16, 17
 - c. Vital values, 18-20
 - d. Valid victory, 21, 22
2. Judgment Announced, Isa. 31:1-3
 - a. Faithless folly, 1
 - b. Faithful facts, 2
 - c. Fearful future, 3
3. Judgment's Alternatives, Jer. 21:8-10
 - a. Alternatives affirmed, 8, 9
 - b. Alternatives affixed, 10

Notes on the Printed Text:

Judgment Averted, Psalm 33:13-22.

For genuine believers in the gospel, legal judgment is averted, Christ having taken upon Himself at Calvary the full legal punishment of our sins. (I Cor. 15:1-3; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; I Pe. 2:24; 3:18; etc.) So God is able to extend mercy without being unjust. (Ro. 3:26.)

Throughout the Bible there is a clear distinction between God's favored people on the one hand and His enemies (lost sinners) on the other. His people are the special object of His mercy, though still subject to temporal judgments; His enemies are the special object of His wrath, though still blessed with temporal mercies. (Mat. 5:45.)

Vantage Vision, 13-15.

We cannot see God, but He sees us—even "all the inhabitants of the earth." Distance has no difficulties for His all-seeing eye. Further, His vision is not limited to outward appearances; as "He fashioneth their hearts alike," He is able to consider all their works with perfect understanding of motives and consequences.

Vain Violence, 16, 17.

Resistance to divine judgment is futile. Kings or dictators with all their mighty armies will but destroy themselves in opposing God. A mighty man with all his strength will find himself weak and helpless before God. And if any should trust in a horse, or in some more modern means of help, however great the strength of that earthly help, he will find it "a vain thing for safety," and unable to deliver.

Vital Values, 18-20.

So it turns out that the only One able to deliver us from the judgment of God is God Himself. We must, so to speak, throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. Our only hope is in His mercy, and His mercy is in Christ. And He is not unwilling to show mercy, but "the eye of Jehovah is upon them that fear him," and His purpose is "to deliver their soul from death."

Here are the vital values of salvation, in Jehovah alone. Speaking for all who have this living faith, the psalmist was moved to exclaim:

"Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield."

Valid Victory, 21, 22.

When Jehovah helps us by bearing our judgment Himself, and Himself shields us from His own wrath, our victory is valid and assured; and so "our heart shall rejoice in him."

On our side, it is through no merit of ours that we come to rejoice in God our Savior, but simply "because we have trusted in his holy name." As to the extent of God's mercy upon us, we can be sure that it will be "according as we hope" in Him.

Judgment Announced, Isaiah 31:1-3.

Specifically, this is an announcement by the prophet of temporal judgment that was to come upon Judah and Jerusalem. The prophecy was fulfilled in due time.

Faithless Folly, 1.

How foolish it is for people who claim to be the chosen people of God to seek help from earthly sources while failing to "seek the Lord!" Evidently, whatever their profession, they have no real faith in God; they believe rather that they can get all the help they need from this world.

Faithful Facts, 2.

Yet the prophet remained faithful, and faithfully recited some facts. God is wise, and can give wisdom to us. (Jas. 1:5.) Since His people were unrepentant, God would not call back His words of judgment. He would "arise against" evil-doers, and those who helped them would partake of their judgment.

Fearful Future, 3.

When puny men pit themselves against the almighty God, when mere flesh dares to oppose the eternal Spirit, the result is not hard to predict. The hand of the Lord stretched out in wrath will cast down His enemies, so that "they all shall fall together."

Judgment's Alternatives, Jeremiah 21:8-10.

God's judgments are declared in advance for the explicit purpose of providing alternatives for morally responsible creatures. We are not mere puppets, robots, or helpless pawns of fate. Continually God calls upon men to choose for themselves their own course.

Alternatives Affirmed, 8, 9.

"Life" and "death" in this context refer to natural life in the flesh. The alternatives affirmed by the prophet as a spokesman for God were clear enough. The people must either surrender to the Chaldeans or die in the siege.

Alternatives Affixed, 10.

We are limited in our choices. We cannot do just anything we wish. The inhabitants of Jerusalem naturally did not wish either to die or to surrender; they would have liked rather to defeat their enemies and to remain both alive and free. But it was too late for that. Their sins had brought upon them a divine decree of judgment, and their choice was limited to the terms of that decree.

Jerusalem was under the temporal judgment of God: it must be captured and burned. Its inhabitants might escape into a foreign captivity, or they could stay and die where they were.

Key Verse:

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II Corinthians 4:18.

Earthly situations and events may sometimes serve to illustrate the heavenly. Spiritual realities, however, are more enduring than the physical. Paradoxically we are said here to look at things not seen. We look at the invisible things of God, not with the natural eye or with the natural mind, but with the eye of faith and with the mind of the Spirit.

Unseen things can thus be seen by faith, and these are the things that are eternal.