

LESSON 285

SALVATION AND JUDGMENT

Related Scripture: John 12:12-34

KEY VERSE: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."—John 3:36.

Lesson Scripture: John 12:35-50

Introduction:

Apart from Jesus Christ, all men are by nature lost sinners. They are born spiritually dead, and the only life they know is a deadly practice of depraved rebellion against their Creator. This is the clear picture of fallen humanity revealed in the infallible word of God.

Yet their spiritually dead condition is no excuse for sinners, who have freely chosen for themselves the way of death. No doctrine of the Bible is more clear and definite than the doctrine of individual human responsibility or accountability to God. And the only scriptural hope for a lost sinner is to be found in the Son of God.

Quite simply, the ultimate difference between belief and unbelief in Jesus Christ is the difference between life and death, light and darkness, salvation and judgment, heaven and hell.

Scripture included in this week's lesson may be outlined as follows:

1. Invitation, John 12:35, 36
 - a. Time to beware, 35
 - b. Time to believe, 36
2. Imprecation, John 12:37-41
 - a. Continual unbelief, 37, 38
 - b. Confirmed unbelief, 39-41
3. Infatuation, John 12:42, 43
 - a. Foolish loyalty, 42
 - b. Foolish love, 43
4. Integration, John 12:44-46
 - a. Christ and the Father, 44, 45
 - b. Christ and the faithful, 46
5. Identification, John 12:47-50
 - a. Word conserving, 47
 - b. Word condemning, 48
 - c. Word commanded, 49, 50

Notes on the Printed Text:

Invitation, John 12:35, 36.

Evangelists have no reason to be discouraged that most people who hear the gospel will not accept its invitation. The fact is that when Jesus in His own bodily ministry presented Himself as Savior, most of His hearers refused His invitation.

Time to Beware, 35.

Jesus was speaking here of His personal presence in the flesh, but we may well note that He Who is the true Light gives light to every man that comes into the world. (Jn. 1:9.) The time to beware of darkness is when we are given enough light to come to more light, lest a deeper darkness come upon us. The soul that walks in complete darkness does not know where he is going. The course of those who reject the light and continue in darkness is described in some detail in Romans 1:18-32.

Time to Believe, 36.

Could any evangelist give a more pointed invitation than this? "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." Whether or not we can fit these words into our human systems of theology is not important: the important thing is to believe Jesus; and those who refuse to believe His plain words will find, as these people did, that He hides Himself from them. The time to believe in the light is while we have light.

Imprecation, John 12:37-41.

All unredeemed sinners are under the curse of God's holy law (Gal. 3:10), but there are degrees of sin and guilt. All sinners are separated from God, but some are further away than others. Repeated and continued rebellion brings on in greater measure the curse of blinded eyes and hardened hearts.

Continual Unbelief, 37, 38.

No amount of evidence can persuade those whose minds and hearts are closed against the truth. People see what they want to see, hear what they want to hear, believe what they want to believe, and ignore all else.

Confirmed Unbelief, 39-41.

"They could not believe." Their disability was of themselves. True, God blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; but this was a consequence of their sins against Him. Theologians call this judicial hardening; but whatever we call it, the fact is that sin brings on its own disability. The difficulty is not intellectual, but moral and spiritual; sinners cannot believe because they will not believe.

Infatuation, John 12:42, 43.

By nature men will not devote themselves to God because of their infatuation with themselves, with the world, or with sin. Whether these rulers who "believed" in Jesus believed "to the saving of the soul" (He. 10:39) I do not know; if they did have saving faith we can be sure that in time they gained enough courage and love of God to confess Christ openly, as did Joseph of Arimathea. (Jn. 19:38.)

Foolish Loyalty, 42.

Loyalty to friends and to God makes good sense; loyalty to enemies of our souls is nonsense. When we have truly committed ourselves to Christ, we shall seek our friends among His friends.

Foolish Love, 43.

Men's praise changes like the weather; not only do different men praise different things, but individually and collectively they are fickle, condemning tomorrow what they praised yesterday. "Seeking the praise of men is foolish, futile, and frustrating. Let us rather love the praise of God, Who changes not.

Integration, John 12:44-46.

Psychologists talk about an integrated personality; the Psalmist prayed, "Unite my heart." (Ps. 86:11.) Jesus brings an inner harmony to the soul.

Christ and the Father, 44, 45.

Father and Son are to be thought of as in some sense different Persons, and yet they are one and the same God. This God is jealous against false gods, but there is no jealousy between the Persons of the Trinity. Both the Father and the Holy Spirit are pleased to have us worship the Christ.

Christ and the Faithful, 46.

"God is light" (I Jn. 1:5), and so Jesus is the Source of spiritual light in the world. But this light is reflected in the lives of all who believe in Him, so that we do not remain in darkness.

Identification, John 12:47-50.

The Son of God became the Son of Man. That same Jesus is both Savior and Judge. His word is a twoedged sword; that same sword can cut to heal or to slay.

Word Conserving, 47.

Unbelievers do not change the truth of God's word; it still stands. But neither do they change the divine schedule; God does not get in a hurry to bring them to judgment. The first coming of Christ was a mission of salvation; judgment can wait.

Word Condemning, 48.

Rejecting Jesus and refusing to receive His words amounts to the same thing. His word condemns all unbelievers, including those hypocrites who pretend to honor Him while denying His words. The very word which He spoke and which they disbelieved will judge them "in the last day."

Word Commanded, 49, 50.

"His commandment is life everlasting." His commandment is according to His will "that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." (Jn. 6:40.) So God the Father commands us to have a living faith; God the Son gives us life in and through Himself; and God the Holy Spirit enables us to receive it. (I Cor. 2:9-12; II Th. 2:13.)

Key Verse:

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."—John 3:36.

Genuine believers have everlasting life as a present possession. Surely that life should grow and develop here on earth, and surely we shall inherit the fullness of it in the world to come; but in some measure we have it and should enjoy it right now, if we are true believers in Christ.

On the other hand, unbelievers are not merely going to be lost; they are lost right now, and as unbelievers they shall never experience the life of God. The wrath of God is already upon them, and remains on them.