
The Jolt of Judgment

Lord, I received you as my Saviour!
Lord, I confessed you before men!
Lord, I was buried with you in Christian baptism!
Lord, I attended all the services of the church!
Lord, I paid tithes of all that I possessed!
Lord, I read my Bible daily!
Lord, I prayed before every meal!
Lord, I got my neighbor to go to church with me!
Lord, I spoke in tongues . . . cast out demons . . .
and in Thy name did many wonderful works!

But Jesus Will Say . . .

I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and yet took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not (Matt. 25:42-44).

What a jolt! Many of us have become so involved with the rituals of Christianity that we have little time, and virtually no interest in doing the very things that meant the most to Jesus.

Twelve thousand people a day are dying from starvation and malnutrition, but we hassle about the Lord's Supper. Transubstantiation? Consubstantiation? Fermented or

unfermented? Leavened or unleavened? One cup or many? Weekly? Monthly? Quarterly? etc. etc. etc.

Large sections of our globe are parched, arid and shackled by drought, but we debate the subject of baptism. Pouring? Sprinkling? Immersion? For the remission of sins or otherwise?

Millions are homeless, but we sacrificially spend hundreds of millions of dollars not to build homes for the homeless, but to build cathedrals in which to worship Jesus.

While a billion souls are shivering in the cold, we lambast the liberals and steer clear of the social gospel — “Passing by on the other side” (Lk. 10:31).

We feel little or no compunction or regret for not ministering to the sick or rectifying some discrepancy in our penal system — we are servants of Jesus! We will preach to the lost! We will sing songs to the starving. We will pass out literature to the cold, pray for the sick and vote for tough law enforcement.

But judgment will be based on the way we have loved our fellow men!

Please be assured, dear reader, that this type of judgment was not the result of some last minute change of plans on the part of God. *It has always been His intention for men to love one another. This is the message that God has been trying to get across from the beginning!*

The book of Job is thought by some to be the oldest book in the Bible. Be that as it may it is without question a very ancient document but observe that it reflects a philosophy of life in perfect harmony with God's eternal purpose. Please consider:

*Judgment involves our
treatment of:*

the hungry
the thirsty
strangers
naked
prisoners
the sick

(Matt. 25:31-46)

Job cared for:

poor
fatherless
dying
widows
blind
lame

oppressed

(Jb. 29:12-17)

When God decided to judge His people during the days of Isaiah, He used the same standard of humanitarian concern that had been in vogue since Eden and would be enforced in the end of the world. Isaiah 58:1-7 is very much to the point: They sought God daily (came to church every day). They delighted to know His ways (loved to study the Bible).

They forsook not the ordinance of God (kept the letter of the law).

They asked for the ordinance of justice (wanted religious instruction).

They took delight in approaching God (loved to pray).

But their whole approach to religion had missed the matter of love!

Therefore, Isaiah wrote:

Is this the fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

In other words, the ultimate aim of God was not just to see men bow down like a bullrush or wear certain garments; the ultimate aim of God was to get people to love. Therefore, Isaiah continues:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break not every yoke? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him: and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh (Is. 58:6-8).

This passage from Isaiah is representative of the Judgment of God as revealed through all of the prophets (see Jer. 22:3; Mic. 6:6-8; Hos. 6:6; Am. 5:21-24; Zech. 7:9-10, 8:16-17; etc., etc.).

Jesus

With the coming of Jesus the plan of God did not change; it became even more intense. Jesus was the personification of what God had been trying to communicate all along. A word is a vehicle of communication and Jesus is the "Word" of God. He is the express image of His person. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body.

He began His public ministry by cleansing the temple of those who had no regard for the needs of others. He gathered around Him a band of peasants and went about doing good. He healed the sick and showed compassion on those in need. He challenged the religious establishment of the day by placing the needs of humanity above the traditions of the elders. His life-style was a radical departure from the tightly structured theology of His contemporaries. He placed a premium upon the needs of people. He insisted that the Sabbath Day was made for man and not vice versa. For this reason He did not hesitate to heal on the Sabbath or to use that holy day in meeting human needs. In similar

fashion He was free to fraternize with social outcasts, and His propensity to enjoy life caused His enemies to denounce Him as a "gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."

The Early Church

Jesus gave to His disciples an example that they should follow in His steps. For this reason we are not surprised to see the early church placing a priority upon humanitarian concern. The Scriptures affirm, "neither was there among them any that lacked . . ." (Acts 4:34). Those possessed by the Spirit of Jesus could not be possessed by things. They, therefore, sold their possessions and goods and distributed them as every man had need.

It is significant to remember that the first men chosen by the early church to function in an official capacity were selected to deal with the problems of starvation and discrimination (Acts 6:1-8). Some would consider these men the first "deacons" of the church.

The first use of the word "elders" with reference to Christianity is again associated with relief for the poor. In Acts 11:30 the disciples at Antioch sent relief unto the brethren in Judea conveying it to the "elders" of the church in Jerusalem at the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The first person to be raised from the dead after the establishment of the church was a woman named Dorcas who was "full of good works and almsdeeds" (Acts 9:36). Her generosity to the poor was evident by the presence of widows who stood weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. The association of this woman with "widows" adds weight to the supposition that Dorcas was one of the widows above 60 years of age who vowed never to marry (see I Tim. 5).

The first Gentile to become a Christian without first becoming a Jew was Cornelius, a devout centurion who gave much alms to the people (Acts 10:2).

The book of James maintains a strong and unmistakable emphasis upon helping the poor and this is possibly the first New Testament book to be written. In chapter one he describes pure religion as overseeing the fatherless and widows. In chapter two he denounced discrimination against the poor in their assemblies and discusses faith and works in a context dealing with those who are "naked and destitute of daily food." He describes love as the

“royal law” and the “law of liberty.” In chapter three church leaders are encouraged not to curse their brethren but to use the tongue in the promotion of peace. In chapter four we are reminded that friendship with the world makes us an enemy of God and promotes war and fighting in the brotherhood. Those who speak evil of a brother are said to speak evil of the law. Chapter five presents a scathing denunciation to the rich who lived in pleasure and defrauded the poor. How can we read such a letter as this without directly relating it to the social issues of our day?

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders, he called to their attention that for three years he had worked in their midst supporting himself as well as those who were with him. He had done this as an example so that they too would “so labor” and support the weak. Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus who taught that it was more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:31-35), he later wrote in the Ephesian letter:

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Eph. 4:28).

Those who refuse to work were not to be encouraged in their laziness and lethargy.

. . . for even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat . . . (II Thes. 3:10).

Let us, however, not use such thoughts to blind us to the eternal purpose of God regarding our love. Toward the close of the apostolic age the message “from the beginning” had never changed and John wrote:

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels

of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (I Jn. 3:10-18).

Conclusion

This simplistic overview of human history reveals that during every dispensation God has manifested a dramatic concern over interpersonal relationships. For Christians to share in this concern is not some irrelevant issue or tangent; it is the ultimate aim of the Christian Gospel and will be emphasized as a central aspect of Judgment.

There is certainly a danger that some brethren will abandon the love of God and devote themselves to a purely humanistic philosophy of life. An ultimate extreme of athiestic humanism is illustrated for us by Communism. Under the guise of attempting to serve humanity without the benefit of God, they have created a police state where society is held in check by force. The machine gun and the barbed wire fence are standard equipment in a Communistic "utopia."

There is a far greater danger, however, that religiously-oriented people will try to serve God without the benefit of humanitarian concern. Those who possess the Spirit of Jesus cannot help but be concerned about their fellow men. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, we also manifest the presence of Jesus in our lives by the way we treat one another. What Jesus began to do in the body, the body continues to do in Jesus. *By love we are to be enslaved to one another* (Gal. 5:13).

It is appointed unto everyone once to die and then to appear in Judgment (Heb. 9:29). Please do not disregard what Jesus had to say for it is His word which will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48).

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 11

1. Should the statements of Jesus about the hungry, thirsty, etc. be taken figuratively?
2. Does your church have any active ministry for the physical needs of humanity? Should it?
3. Do we as Christians have any responsibility for non-Christians who are hungry?
4. Which is easier — to love God or to love your neighbor?
5. Who is our neighbor today?
6. Did the Jerusalem church practice a form of communism?
7. Does a church have to de-emphasize evangelism in order to care for physical needs?