

The punishment of the unrighteous

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Word of God this morning, and we will look at God's Word in both the Old Testament and in the New, in the chapters that we have read in Matthew chapter 10 and Ecclesiastes chapter 8.

Now last Lord's Day morning I was reminded when I went out that I announced that the Old Testament reading was from the 8th chapter of Proverbs, and everyone looked for the 8th chapter of Proverbs, and what I was reading was not to be found there.

I was not mildly rebuked, but gently reminded. But you know, I knew I was in the wrong chapter after I started reading it, but I just carried on. I didn't know why I wasn't in Proverbs, because I knew the 8th chapter of Proverbs and this wasn't it, but I didn't notice it was Ecclesiastes.

But as I read that chapter, I felt that there were certain very telling truths in it, truths that I had never noticed before.

And so into my mind there came a series of thoughts that perhaps I might be able to preach something from that chapter.

[1 : 32] And during the week, I felt that perhaps this was the line that maybe we should take for two or three weeks.

And so then I turned to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 10, and there was a text there, a passage of truth, that seemed to me to be also very telling.

And so this morning what I want to do is really, is to give an overall look into these two chapters, and then follow certain of the teachings through during the next week or two.

And when I came to Matthew, chapter 10, I found that it was, in a sense, Jesus' inauguration speech to the disciples.

I thought of President Regan's inaugural speech. Well, this was the inaugural speech of Jesus of Nazareth, when he sent out his 12 disciples to preach the Gospel.

[2 : 48] He had a program that he intended to fulfill. He had the people he intended to fulfill it with.

They seemed very insignificant to begin to carry out the program of world evangelization.

Two thousand years have gone, and this program is being carried out. But as I read his inauguration speech, I found something very solemn in it.

Something fiercely solemn. I know that he promised them opposition. He promised them imprisonment. He promised them even martyrdom.

There's nothing in the Gospel that promises a needy passage. And you'll find that in this chapter of God's Word. He says they will put you to prison.

[3 : 53] They'll put you out of the synagogue. They'll de-socialize you. Because that's exactly what they did to me.

And they say in this speech, it is, the servant will be no better than the master.

And when they put him on a cross, there was a vacancy on a cross. In one sense, for all who will follow.

But in this speech also, there is a certain other thing that link with the truth of the wise man in Ecclesiastes.

And I think that this is one of the most solemn parts of the whole Bible. When I was in Australia, you'll remember that John Lennon was tragically shot.

[4 : 59] Now I remember, and I bear in mind this this morning, that when I visited John Lennon in hospital, and we were talking for a couple of hours, he said this to me.

He said, You know what Mr. Patterson said? I'm in hospital because of my sin. I said, What? I'm in hospital because of my sin.

I had an accident. A car went off the road up in the north of Sutherland, and it was my karma for what I had done wrong. And I'm suffering now for my sin.

I said to him, John, I said, Whatever may be the cause of your accident, real suffering for sin will come later when you meet the great judge.

I said, Jesus said, that the karma or the punishment of the unrighteous will come later.

[6 : 07] He said he didn't. I said, Yes. He said, Where did he say it? And I quoted something that I'm going to quote just now from this text. He said, He didn't say that.

I said, It's in the Bible, John. It's not, he said. He said, Show me your Bible. And I didn't have one. So he said, Go home and get it. And I went away home from Gospy to Brora, about four or five miles, came back with my Bible.

And I read this to him. These words of Jesus. Fear not them, Verse 28.

Fear not them, which kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul. But rather, fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

I said, That's the most solemn words that I know in the Bible. He said, Well, I don't want to believe that.

[7 : 25] And I said, Well, it's not what we want to believe, John. It's what Christ declares to be true. And you know, my friends, this is indeed one of the very solemn parts of God's Word.

And it's a part of God's Word that has been diluted by many in the Christian Church in different generations.

Many say this is a hard thing. Who can bear it? And they forget to link this verse with another part of Jesus' inauguration speech to the disciples.

He says these words. Now listen to them carefully because here is the root cause. And he says very simply, he says, There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed.

Verse 26. There is nothing covered that will not be revealed and hid that shall not be known. There are many things in our lives that we cover.

[8 : 48] in our thought life we cover so many things. But there is nothing that we are guilty of producing that will remain uncovered in that day.

In any words, God says, what we do we will give an account for. What we've been will be opened up.

There is nothing covered. Not one of us will get away with what we've done. And we are accountable as creatures of God for everything that we do and think from the cradle to the grave. Now Jesus places that in the center of the teaching that he gives to his disciples both the comfort and the warning.

He tells us simply three things and that's what we in the New Testament we're going to look at just in passing this morning before we go to the old.

[10 : 12] Not forgetting his solemn words. He tells us in these words that there is a distinction between the body and the soul.

the soul. He says, fear not him who is able to destroy the body. It is possible to destroy the body. Even the body of the Christ was killed. But he says, fear ye him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell.

So the first thing is that there is a distinction made by Jesus with regard to the soul and the body. You see the body is what we might call the executive of the soul.

the body is the part of us that carries out the instructions. The hands do what the mind says.

[11 : 33] The eyes smile and the mind laughs. The hands and the feet walk in the way of wickedness but they have their source in the inner being of man the soul.

And although the body is really the thing that brings sin or wickedness into active fruition it begins in the mind.

And there is a distinction right throughout the scriptures between the soul and the body. Now, what Jesus was basically saying to the disciples was this, the second thing.

Man can destroy the body but he cannot touch the soul. He's telling the same thing again. He said, your enemies are my enemies.

They will do to some of you what they did to me. But they can only get to the body part of you. They can't get to the real you.

[12 : 43] And so there is a fear, he says, that is rational and a fear that is irrational. a fear that is a fear that is commended and a fear that is prohibited.

He says to the disciples, fear God. Fear Him who has the absolute power and don't fear those who have limited power.

committed power. My friends, these are the teachings of Jesus. That's the second thing. The third thing he says to them here is that he's sinful also.

And it's fearful. He says, God can and will destroy both the body and the soul of the unrighteous person in hell.

That's solemn teaching. No, we're faced with a choice. We are either going to believe that which Christ cradled in the gospel message.

[14:16] Or we are going to believe the product of our own sinful, rebellious, depraved minds.

They may be sophisticated minds. highly intelligent minds. They may be highly intelligent minds.

They may be grossly immoral minds.

They may be tragically self-righteous minds that we might have. We're not disputing anything like that. But we are saying this, that there is a choice.

And cradled in the inauguration message of Jesus there is this.

And I want to suggest this morning that at stake is the very authenticity of Christ himself. Jesus said many other things.

[15:22] He told them how he would die. He told them he would conquer death. He told them that they would wait in another room and he would send the Holy Spirit and fill them.

give them comfort and power to bring this message to the world of that day. Everything else he said has happened.

Dare we say that he was misguided? Or do we come to the place where we've got to accept that evil and wickedness in this world and in ourselves is a reality that we can't evade.

We can't evade the flash of temper. We can't evade the surge of jealousy. We can't evade the sometimes impulsive rages where we could shake people.

We can't evade the fact that our bodies are riddled with a nervous intensity that makes us prone so often to do wrong in spite of the fact that we know what is right.

[16:48] My Bible just says that is our evil state. And the bodies, I say, are the vehicles of the soul.

Jesus said, and we will look at this in more depth later, don't be afraid of him who is able to destroy the body.

That's not the worst. Don't even just be afraid of him who is able to destroy the soul. That's not bad enough. That's not bad enough.

But fear him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell. Now as the wise man in Ecclesiastes looked at it, he saw part of this in shadow he formed.

And in the book of Ecclesiastes, he concentrates largely on the moment of death.

[17:54] This is what he does in Ecclesiastes chapter 8. He concentrates really on what leads up to the future.

And if you look at him, you'll find that the bearing of his message is threefold. First of all, before death. Then death itself.

And then, although in much more shadowy form, after death. And he draws a distinction in Ecclesiastes between the person who lives evilly and rejects the commandments of God and the person who fears God.

He's saying the very same thing in more shadowy form. Now he is writing, as you'll find in the book of Ecclesiastes, to show that everything in this world ultimately, apart from God's blessing on it and God's power in it, is vanity.

That's the whole of the message. And so he says, before death, basically, we should note three things. First of all, there should be consideration.

[19:18] We should consider deeply what God says about us. We should consider deeply what our end will be.

Now, there's no doubt, as we'll read this in a moment, that there comes a time for every one of us to die.

What does he say in Ecclesiastes chapter 8? Let me read it to you. There is no man that hath power over his spirit, power to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death.

It's very profoundly and graphically put. There is no man that hath power over his spirit. You see? There's a difference now between the spirit, or the soul, the psuche, and the body.

There's no man with power over it. He has no power, he says, to retain it. And when the spirit is taken away, the body dies and disintegrates.

[20 : 34] But Jesus takes the teaching further and he says, that's not the end of the body of the ungodly. That's not the end of it. And then he says, neither hath he power in the day of death.

And so these are things that before death must be considered. Considered carefully. And the second thing you find in Ecclesiastes is that not only must there be consideration of what God has said, but there must be reflection on what we have been.

Is God right in what he says? Is God truthful in what he says? Is God genuining his accusations against us? There must be reflection on our living.

And if the Creator made us to serve him, if the Creator made us and we've rebelled against him, therefore we're guilty, there's got to be reflection.

And if we're all going to die and this is going to be the end, Jesus says there must be preparation. There must be consideration.

[21 : 50] There must be reflection. And there must be preparation. My friends, in all genuineness I say to you, have you prepared for the day of your death? Come on.

You see others. A number of us here this week went to the tragic funeral of a girl of 18.

Age doesn't come into it. Have we prepared for the greatest and most fearful moment of our existence?

When we will go into God's unknown and find him to be real? Now, whatever we have in this earth, it's scruffy stuff compared to God's future and God's tomorrow.

So before death we must have consideration, reflection, and then preparation. Have you prepared? There's only one way to prepare for death.

[23 : 03] And that is to go into the experienced, pardoned, cleansed, forgiven. Those who wrote our shorter catechism said these words, wonderful words.

Listen to them. The souls of believers at the moment of death are made perfectly holy and do immediately pass into glory.

Their bodies rest in the grave for a time until the first great resurrection. Now, before death the wise man says then there should be these three things.

But he largely in this chapter concentrates on the time of death. And he says with regard to the time of death a very simple thing. You find it written here and I'll read it out to you in verse 5.

He says, Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel or know no evil at that moment. Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil.

[24 : 21] And so the wise man recognized evil. That there was an experience of evil. That there should be a fear of evil.

That's what Jesus said, you know. Fear. Him who is able to destroy the soul and the body. Why?

Because they're evil. Because they're wicked. Wicked. Wickedness and evil is something to be feared. You know. You go to look into the world and see the progressive evidence of evil.

Imagine evil uncontrolled. That's what the future would be.

Whatever we would be. If these things are not true. We must recognize evil.

[25 : 24] We must know that there is an experience of evil. And there must be a fear. And the wise man said, Whoever keeps the commandment need not fear this day when evil will be dealt with and punished.

Whoso keeps the commandment. What does that mean? It just means to a Jew. There were two things in the commandment basically to a Jew. There were the commands that God ordered him to keep.

Which he didn't keep fully. But which he attempted to keep. Which he made no excuse for not keeping. He didn't say he was human. He made an attempt to keep the ten commandments of God. That was his whole existence to keep them. But he couldn't keep them. And so God instituted sacrifice.

And once a year the high priest of Israel went into the Holy of Holies with the sacrifice of a pure spotless lamb which had been slain.

[26 : 39] And presented that to God. And in the Holy of Holies the bright dazzling splendor of God would consume the sacrifice.

And tell the people who kept the commandment. Who sought to keep the word of God and depended upon the mercy of God in sacrificial forgiveness.

That was keeping the commandment. Now you come to the New Testament. We have the commandment still. The ten. We have the sermon on the mount.

We have the new commandment as we looked at last week to love each other. Now we may break them. We do break them. But the people of God's intention is to live by them without breaking them. And what happens if we break them? Well we found that last week too. When Jesus died on the cross as the sacrifice. Every breaking of the commandment of everyone by his people was punished in his body.

[27 : 42] And so this is God's way of pardon. Now when we come to death, there is a title here given also.

And here is the title that was given. Those given to wickedness. Those given to wickedness. And he said, I saw the wicked buried who had come and gone from the place of the holy. And they were forgotten. And then the wise man said they were forgotten by men, but remembered by God. And what he's really saying is in that day of death, man is powerless in that day. Man is in a fearful condition in that day.

Man will be enlightened in that day and man will be lost in that day. And he can't stop it coming. What lies ahead then for the unbeliever?

[28 : 50] Does God punish a person just because he's an unbeliever? No. Someone says, but oh, isn't that a sin?

Yes, but it's not the only sin. God punishes his creature not just because they're an unbeliever, but because they're sinful and their body has executed in this life that God has given them.

That which their soul has demanded. And that's the real you and me. In the next week or two we will look maybe in particular at God's tomorrow for the ungodly and the unsaved.

Because it's very specific. Although it's ignored. We may ignore it. We may reject it. We may even scorn it.

But we'll all face it. And we'll look at it in the next week or so. Someone says, where did that leave me this morning?

[30 : 05] I say to you, in all honesty, you might not see next week. And as the wise man said, these things are for consideration now.

For reflection now. And for preparation now. Although we may study the subject over the next week or two.

There may be folks in church this morning who won't be here in the next week or two. But you have no power to retain your spirit. That's what the man said.

You have no power in the day of death. And so this morning, in remembering these words of Jesus, that there is a God's tomorrow, should we not be prepared? One of the old prophets says, prepare to meet your God. We've seen that stacked in the back of men walking the streets and many of us in our wilder days might have laughed at it. Prepare to meet your God.

The man's a fool. No, my friends, these are the words of the prophet. These are the words of the Christ. And there's a reason for them.

[31 : 35] Unless we go into death forgiven, there is no way out.

Now this morning I want you just to consider that. With all that you've got here, with all that you know, I'm telling you this time is short. And if you don't receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, if you don't do it personally, if you don't do it repentantly, if you don't do it thankfully, if you don't receive him as your Saviour, now, I can't promise you another day. But I can declare unto you Christ's word.

And so this morning I say to you all, I say to myself, will you not ask Jesus to be your Saviour and start following the commandment. For he that keepeth the commandment, with the help of the Son of God, will fear no evil in that day. Shall we pray?

We bless thee, O God, for the wonderful invitation of the Scriptures. We thank thee for the solemnity of the warning.

We bless thee that we are not left in ignorance, even while we are in rebellion. And we pray thee this morning, that through the preaching of the word, there may be some here in church who will humbly go to the Lord Jesus, in the quietness of their hearts, and ask him to be their Saviour. In Jesus' name, Amen.