

The Word Saves

I must admit to feeling a bit culpable that I still remember this commercial jingle from 1974: “Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce—special orders don’t upset us. All we ask is that you let us have it your way.” That was the basis of a fast-food franchise’s advertising campaign that lasted years and helped put that restaurant chain on the map. Analysts say the campaign worked partially because it tapped into a self-centered cultural trend to do your own thing, to be number one, to think only of yourself, to have it your way.

The problem is that we can too easily carry that catchy jingle beyond our bacon double-cheeseburgers and into the means by which we gain salvation. Rather than putting our trust in Jesus and committing to following Him, we try to earn salvation on our own. Or we decide to have Jesus solely on our own terms, to have Him our way, to have a special-order Jesus: “I’d like a super-size order of grace, and go heavy on the mercy, but please hold any demands on my lifestyle. Did you get that? No life-changes, please.”

Thus, you have for yourself your own idea of Jesus—not His way, but your way. It’s as though you pray the Lord’s Prayer, “My kingdom come, my will be done on earth—and, while you’re at it, up there in heaven, too!” It’s as though you sing the old hymn, “Have mine own way, Lord. Have mine own way. I am the potter, You are my clay.”

- 1.** *In what ways does having it your way conflict with being obedient to God’s will for your life?*
- 2.** *How does believing Jesus’ words help you be submissive to God’s will?*
- 3.** *What blessings do you receive when you are obedient to Jesus’ teachings?*

Looking to Jesus with the Eyes of Faith

John 12:44-46, KJV

44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.

45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

John 12:44-46, NIV

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.

⁴⁵The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

⁴⁶I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

For three years, Jesus conducted His public ministry among His fellow Jews. Amazingly, despite all that Jesus taught and the numerous miracles He performed, the nation as a whole did not welcome Him as their Messiah (John 1:11). Yet, even as the Passover festival drew near (12:1) and Jesus' ministry on Earth ended, He remained ever vigilant to invite as many people as possible to turn to Him in faith (12:44).

A consistent teaching in the fourth Gospel is that the Father "sent" the Son into the world. Indeed, He was the Father's chosen representative to herald the truth of the Gospel. For instance, John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the "Son of God" (1:34, KJV). Later, in 7:16, Jesus declared that what He taught did not originate with Him, but with the Father, who dispatched the Son to the world.

Moreover, the Son did not operate on His own "authority", (7:28, NIV) but the authority of the Father, who was characterized by truth. So close was the relationship between the Father and His approved emissary that knowing the Son equated to knowing the Father (8:19).

Jesus explained that one of the reasons He came to Earth was to be a "light" (John 12:46). He noted that His aim was twofold. First, He wanted the lost to put their trust in Him. Second, He knew that in doing so, the lost would

no longer “abide in darkness (KJV).” Throughout John’s Gospel, the apostle often used the metaphor of “light” and “darkness” to contrast the ways of God with the ways of the world. The concept of light and darkness had great significance in Hebrew culture. In Scripture, the words “lamp,” “light,” and “life” are often used as synonyms. In Jesus’ teachings, being cast into “outer darkness” was symbolic of the coming judgment of the unrighteous (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

4. *What sort of connection is there between trusting in the Son and the Father?*

5. *What reason did Jesus give for coming to Earth from heaven?*

Heeding Jesus’ Words with a Believing Heart

John 12:47-50, KJV

47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

John 12:47-50, NIV

⁴⁷“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. ⁴⁹For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. ⁵⁰I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

The fourth Gospel presents Jesus of Nazareth as the eternal Word of God (1:1). What He proclaimed was both divinely inspired and supremely important. On at least one occasion, when Jesus taught the crowds, they were “amazed” (Mark 1:27, NIV) at what He revealed about the Father and humankind. Unlike the experts in the law, Jesus taught with genuine “authority.”

Jesus’ statement recorded in John 12:47 reflects this perspective. He declared that, at His first coming, He would not “judge” those who heard His teaching but failed to heed it. This did not mean they would escape God’s condemnation. Instead, divine judgment would come at another time. After all, as Jesus explained, the purpose of His first advent was to make salvation freely available to the lost. Nonetheless, a future time of reckoning awaited those who spurned the Son (Heb. 9:27).

John 12:48 personifies Jesus’ “words” as the source of the unbelievers’ judgment. These are individuals who, because they categorically refused to “accept” what the Messiah taught, treated Him with contempt. Therefore, “at the last day,” the “very words” Jesus spoke, would “condemn” His detractors.

Jesus was referring to a future period of judgment that would take place during His second advent. He may be referring to what is known as the “sheep and goats” judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46, when He will judge the nations and put the “sheep” on His right and the “goats” on His left (vs. 33). The righteous sheep, who lived in agreement with Jesus’ teaching, would be rewarded for their hospitality and concern for others. In contrast, the goats, who opposed Jesus’ teaching, would be eternally punished for their indifference.

In keeping with what Jesus stated in John 12:44, He asserted in verse 49 that whenever He spoke, it was not on His own initiative and authority. Rather, as the Father’s faithful representative, the Son repeated what the Father “commanded” the Son to declare.

In 12:50, Jesus disclosed that He knew, with absolute

certainty, that what the Father commanded the Son to proclaim resulted in “eternal life.” It is no wonder that the Father and the Son were in perfect agreement as to what He would say and do throughout the course of His public ministry on Earth, including His willingness to offer Himself in sacrificial death on the Cross. Jesus spoke to those who welcomed His teaching, put their trust in Him, and experienced the Father’s forgiveness.

Jesus concluded His public ministry with one last appeal to the people to put their trust in Him. Believing in Him would be the same as believing in God, who had sent Him. Indeed, to see God the Son is to see God the Father (12:44, 45). Not only is Jesus one with God, He is also the light that dispels the darkness. Everyone is condemned to spiritual darkness except for those who receive Jesus as the spiritual light. Jesus called the people to enter into His light and be delivered from the world’s darkness (vs. 46).

Jesus’ purpose for coming into this world was not to judge those who refused to listen and obey His teachings. In fact, they condemn themselves by rejecting Jesus and His words. Jesus’ purpose for coming was to save the world—that is, those who turn to Him as their Lord and Savior (vss. 47, 48). Jesus did nothing apart from His heavenly Father, who had sent Him into the world to deliver the message of eternal life. Jesus conveyed this message exactly as God desired. Jesus delivered the message using the exact words and methods His Father instructed.

6. *What expectation did Jesus place on humankind concerning His teaching?*

7. *What consequence awaited those who rejected what Jesus’ taught?*

8. *On behalf of whom did Jesus “speak” (John 12:49)?*

9. *What was the outcome of God’s “commandment” (John 12:50, KJV)?*

Jesus' Startling Announcement

If Jesus' statement in this week's lesson is to be believed, then His words demand both that His divine authority be acknowledged and that His beckoning call be obeyed. Moreover, submission to Jesus cannot be halfhearted or now and then; it must be deliberate and without reservation.

It is certainly true that there will be times in which our faith will waver or entertain doubts, but our trust in His words will always be a bedrock to our faith in Jesus, who will surely light our way through the darkness. And the first step in this journey with Jesus is complete submission to His Lordship. It is then that Christ becomes our Redeemer and our Savior.

If one is hesitant, however, in taking that first step, examine what is holding you back: What fears distress your thoughts? What skepticisms question your resolve? And what desires lure you away from His righteousness? The answers to these questions are not insignificant, and it is because they are significant that Jesus' compassion for us becomes truly evident when we look to Him to be rescued from our tragic estrangement from God.

Yes, believe in Jesus and His startling words, but also place your life in His hands. For when you do, He will guide you along the path of eternal salvation.

"Come to me," Jesus beckons, "all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

10. *Why would Jesus' announcement regarding Himself be startling to His Jewish listeners?*

11. *Why is His announcement still startling today?*

12. *How did or do you respond to Jesus' announcement?*

Abide in Jesus

When Jesus told the Jews that God had sent Him and that He was conveying God's message to them, His listeners were astonished. Subsequently, some believed His words and followed Him—even unto death. Others dismissed His words and turned away. Jesus' words will always be relevant. Our decision to follow them—to follow Him—is crucial as to whether we have eternal life with Him or not.

► *Take a few minutes to write a prayer letter to God. If you already have a saving relationship in Christ Jesus, promise to abide in His Lordship and follow only Him. If you want to initially surrender yourself to Jesus and find eternal life with Him, commit your life to Him in this letter.*

KEY VERSE

I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. —John 12:46, KJV

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. —John 12:46, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 18 through July 24

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 26:12-19—Awake, O Dead, and Sing!
- Tue.** 1 Corinthians 15:12-19—The Dead Shall Be Raised.
- Wed.** 1 Corinthians 15:20-28—In Christ All Are Made Alive.
- Thu.** Daniel 12:1-4—Wake Up!
- Fri.** John 5:25-29—The Dead Will Hear Christ's Voice.
- Sat.** John 11:1, 3-16—Jesus Travels to Lazarus.
- Sun.** John 11:20-27, 38-44—The Raising of Lazarus.