

Scriptural Truths

E-Mail Meditations

The Lord Will Come . . . Perhaps Today . . . Behold, I Come Quickly . . . Rev. 22:7

No. 136

June 2023

Condemned Already

Introduction

It is now 60-70 years ago when I had the privilege of hearing the gospel being preached by men such as Frank Knox. He was a man who, by the Spirit of God in his preaching about Heaven and hell, carried the fear of meeting God, the imminency of the Lord's return, and the need to be ready to meet God. I recall gospel meetings lasting for 6 weeks with men and women, boys and girls getting saved or restored. In particular, in 1964 there was a big tent set up in downtown Belfast holding somewhere in the region of one thousand people and it would be filled night after night. Above the platform was a question that could not be missed. It asked the question:

“Heaven or hell for eternity . . . Which?”

I am sure there are hundreds of saints who long for the preaching of days long gone, a longing to see the Spirit of God moving in the conviction of sinners, and the salvation of individuals and souls restored. I am well aware that we live in a different world. Sunday is no longer a day for families and churches. In many places, Sunday school is a thing of the past. I'm told children won't come, and with work now including Sundays, people cannot go to church. All of this is true but I wonder, “Has the gospel been watered down to a little sermonette? or is there a possibility that Hell is just head knowledge?” I know the world we live in is possibly more corrupt morally than ever, and the general population has little or no time for God's salvation. Yet, my conscience is pricked when I think of Corinth which was a morally dirty, debased city yet the gospel affected the Corinthians, or ancient Athens with the 30,000 gods and goddesses? Instead of considering how the world has changed is it possible to consider, “Have we changed?” or has the presentation of the message changed?

I am embarrassed at times to approach God due to my likeness to Laodicea. Lukewarm, having a casual interest in the glory of God and eternal matters. I am smitten by the words “condemned already”. Some translations translate it as “judged already”. I look at the world and like Lot see a city on which the judgment of God is about to fall. I see a world and like Noah see thousands of people void of interest in the way of salvation and under the condemnation of God. I cannot blame the preachers of the gospel, it is very difficult work. Day after day they spend time in prayer and preach the gospel in sincerity, but so often nothing is done for eternity. I know there are individuals in prisons, sitting in the cells awaiting not the condemnation but the execution of that condemnation, but there is a greater condemnation than that of a man and the carrying out of the death penalty. That greater condemnation is to be “forsaken by God”, to be banished from the entreaties of God forever, never again to have an opportunity to respond to the gospel, no escape or light at the end of the tunnel.

Some years ago an individual was asked, “Why do we seldom see the Spirit of the Lord in building up the saints, the restoring those who have gone astray, or the salvation of individuals?” After a moment’s silence, the answer paraphrased was, “Speaking for myself, possibly because we do not in heart believe what we preach, or practise what we profess”. There is a world of difference between believing a fact as knowledge and believing it in heart as a reality.

Some time ago the Spirit of God focused my attention on John 3:17, “He that believeth hath everlasting life and he that believeth not is condemned already”. It was those last two words which burned into my awareness like thunder reverberating across the mountains. “Condemned already”. It raised a series of solemn questions:

- a) To whom is this being spoken?
- b) What does it mean to be condemned already?
- c) Who are those who are condemned already?
 - i) Is it only those who heard the Lord, saw His miracles and still rejected?
 - ii) Is it those who had/have or will have the opportunity to hear the gospel and turn down the opportunity?
 - iii) Is it those who have heard the gospel and rejected it?
 - iv) Is it those who have heard the gospel, understood it and rejected it?
 - v) Is it every individual who has ever lived, is living or will live whether they have heard the gospel or not?
- d) Is it righteous of God to condemn those who have never heard of the precious name of Jesus and His work?
- e) What responsibility does it put on us who are saved to make sure others know and understand?
- f) What obligation does it put on me to support in whatever way those who are presenting this glorious message of salvation?
- g) Would it be better for them not to hear the gospel and thus their condemnation be less than it would be if they hear, understood and rejected its message?

The two great considerations

- 1) Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? God is righteous in how He provided salvation. His perfection and holiness must not be downgraded. His moral character demands His judgments are true and righteous.
- 2) How will we feel when we see our loved ones standing before the Lord and then being banished into the Lake of Fire?

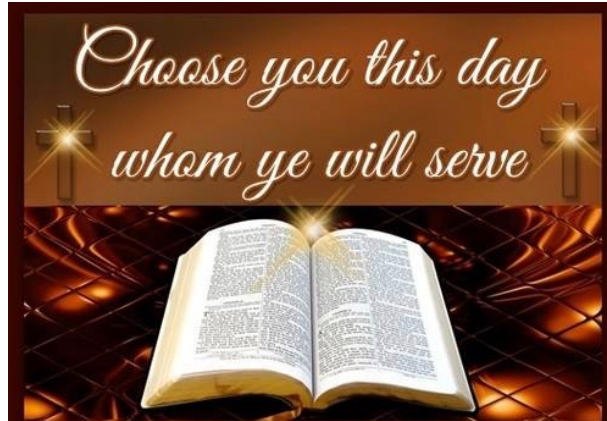
The questions

- 1) To whom is this being spoken?
 - a) This solemn word was spoken either to Nicodemus personally or to some of those in Jerusalem for the Passover, but it is expanded beyond that by the use of the word “world” and its note of the wording, “He that believeth on HIM (that is Christ) is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already because he (the individual) hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn. 3:18).
 - b) It says, “That the world (that is humanity) through Him might be saved”. It is not “through Him and the individual’s religious activities, or through Him and the ecclesiastical position”. Salvation, is through Jesus Christ alone, as he is God’s only way of being translated from the condemnation of eternal damnation.
- 2) What does it mean to be condemned already?
 - a) Many are taught that no one can know for sure if they will go to Heaven. Their understanding is that one does the best they can and at the judgment, their good deeds will be weighed against their sins, and if they have been good enough they will enter Heaven. However, where one goes is not known until the judgment after death. God says “NO, NO NO”. Even as the individual lives on this earth they are already condemned, the sentence is passed, and there is no counter-suiting. As individuals live seeking to do the best they can to please God and get right with Him, they are committing the greatest sin of their entire lives. If a person wants to do a work that is satisfying to God the Lord tells what it is, “Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (Jn. 6:28-29). This is not working for salvation but in believing, it is depending on Christ for salvation. On the cross, the Lord Jesus became the God given substitute for those who believe in Him. He bore the condemnation for them, and He was forsaken by God.
- 3) Is it only those who heard the Lord, saw His miracles and still rejected?
 - a) There can be no doubt that it did refer to them for the Lord condemned Capernaum, saying, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell” (Lk. 10:15). Those people had the blessing that few ever had. They saw and experienced His miracles which were the evidences by the prophecies that He was Messiah. Yet, blinded by envy considered the Lord a deceiver, a rejector of the laws, something He did not do for He came to fulfil the law. What He did do was ignored their false man-made expansions of the law. The expansions the religious hierarchy made indicated an attitude of, “We must go

further than what God said". By such an attitude they blasphemed God by indicating that they were more holy than God. Were they condemned already? An absolute yes, but by the words of the Lord it was expanded beyond them. The words "whosoever" cast the net of condemnation over all humanity. Surely the "whosoever" of John 3:16 did not apply only to those who were there at that time, so the "whosoever" of condemnation and perish also constitutes every individual who has ever lived, is living or will live.

- b) Does it apply to those who in every era had the opportunity to hear the gospel and turned down the opportunity? Accepting that "whosoever" means what is written says, then it applies very much to the people today and those yet to come. Today, by the means of TV, the internet, Twitter etc, the gospel is being presented universally. There can be no doubt the truth of God stands unmovable, such are "condemned already".

. . . . Rowan Jennings



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