

A Judgement Is Coming

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living out one's faith and meeting the responsibility of the light we have received, lest we face judgment.

Duration: 31:05

Scripture: Proverbs 9:12, Matthew 4:13, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:16-24, John 1:14, James 1:22

Topics: "Judgement"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not just having access to the light of God's truth, but also actively engaging with it. He warns against the danger of being blinded by an excess of light, which can happen when people have access to the Bible and attend religious events but fail to truly obey its teachings. The preacher encourages listeners to open their eyes to the truth and not let the light of God's word go to waste. He also highlights the responsibility to repent when confronted with the light of truth, as well as the consequences of failing to do so. The sermon concludes with a reminder that civilization and spiritual growth require constant vigilance and effort.

Transcript

I hope you paid close attention to the reading of the Scripture a while ago. It's a very serious portion. It ends with a precious note that's quite a contrast with the first part of it.

In this eleventh chapter of Matthew, our Lord pronounced judgment on three cities, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Capernaum had been the center of his activity during a large part of his public ministry. As you know, he was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, but when he left Nazareth, he dwelled in Capernaum, Matthew 4.13. That was his earthly home, if he can be said to have one.

Nearby, he called the fishermen and called Matthew. Here is the scene of most of his mighty works. He healed a centurion's servant and the nobleman's son there, Peter's mother-in-law, the paralytic, cast out the demon, and in the synagogue gave that great discourse on the bread of life.

But for all that, they did not accept him. They repented not. It makes it very plain there in verse 21, Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

And to Capernaum, if the mighty works which had been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. What might have happened if? And in this passage, you find yourself asking, Why was the judgment on Capernaum so severe? Why will it be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, of all places, than the day of judgment? Sodom was by far a more wicked city. It's a synonym for moral corruption.

Sodomy is one of the words for one of the vilest forms of depravity, which in spite of all efforts to dress it up today and make it respectable, comes under the severest condemnation in the word of God. And yet, it will be more tolerable for Sodomites in the day of judgment. If you forget what else I say, carry this thought out with you.

Judgment is in proportion not to how many sins we have committed, but how much light we have rejected. Now, don't misunderstand me. We are punished by our sins as well as for our sins.

If a man dies of an ailment because he did not take treatment, he still died of the disease. But Capernaum will fare worse in the day of judgment than Sodom because Capernaum had more light. Matthew 4 tells us, "...and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, The people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." Jesus is the light of the world.

He said, "...he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The light of the world had visited Capernaum, and light always brings responsibility, and Capernaum had reneged on its responsibility. I wish people knew John 3.19 as well as they know John 3.16. John 3.19 says, this is the condemnation, this is the crisis. That's what the word is in the original, same way we spell it except it starts with a K. This is the crisis.

This is the test by which men are judged, that light has come into the world. And men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. So many people have the idea that God's sitting on the throne adding up all our good deeds and our bad deeds, and if there are more good deeds than bad ones, we go to heaven, and if it's the other way around, we go to hell.

But that's not the way the Bible tells it. Jesus Christ precipitated a crisis because men had to do something about it and accept or refuse the light. So men are judged by their response to light, but why did they reject it? Because their deeds are evil.

I remember in the first little church I had, there was a little woman who came every Sunday night to the service. Her husband was an unbeliever. He'd bring her to church and then sit out in the car during the service, out there in the dark in more ways than one.

And many times I've thought about John 3.19 and her connection. I have often thought that while he couldn't take it, he wouldn't come in there because he knew if he came in there the light would be turned on and he'd twist and squirm and be miserable. But she loved the light and came to it because she was walking in the light.

And it says over there that the man in sin doesn't come because he doesn't like the light. But the person who likes the light can take more of it. And if you're walking in the light, you want all the light that you can get.

And we don't like the light because our deeds are evil. Why do they reject it? Because they're in sin. Men reject Jesus Christ for moral and not for philosophical reasons.

Sinners don't want to confess and repent and give up their sins, and so they invent philosophical excuses to cover the real reason. But an excuse is not a reason. It's the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.

And it won't work. We're not sinners because we're skeptics. We're skeptics because we're sinners.

And the skepticism and the philosophizing must have a smokescreen, and so they give very plausible arguments why they don't like what they hear. America's had the greatest gospel opportunity of any nation on earth. More churches, more preaching, more Christian schools, more light.

And if the judgment on this country is in proportion to light rejected, God have mercy on America, I'd rather be a pagan in a land that had no light than to be a cultured American who sinned against the light. Capernaum came under greater condemnation than Sodom because the light had been rejected. How about America? Think of the privileges your city and my city have had all these years of open Bibles and open churches and Christian testimony.

America feels no need of God generally because we think we can work out our own salvation. Our forefathers had a dream of building a nation on scripture principles, but that vision got mixed up somehow with the democratic philosophy of Tom Paine and Tom Jefferson, with its humanistic belief in the innate goodness of man and his own perfectibility. And the ideas out of the Reformation got mixed up with the ideas out of the Revolution, the French Revolution.

And so today you have the priesthood of the believers confused in a lot of people's thinking with the brotherhood of man. And we're trying to create a false millennium and a counterfeit kingdom of heaven that has been superimposed on an unregenerate society that refuses to bow to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This country is only 200 years old, but it may be in the terminal stages of a moral cancer because we've rejected the light that shines three ways.

It shines in the Savior, it shines in the scripture, and it shines in the saints, the other light of the world. Jesus said, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now, it's not enough just to change your mind from, it's to change your mind to.

Repentance is not a change of opinion anyhow. It's a change of inner attitude. And America is not willing to receive the kingdom of heaven, so they're trying to build their own.

Jesus said to Capernaum, Will thou be exalted to heaven? Thou shall be cast down to hell. You know that history is covered in three lattices in Genesis. You've heard that many a time.

Let us make man. And then man said, let's build a tower. And they tried it, and God said, let us go down and confound them.

And that's the three lattices in all history, erected and that. We're building our tower by technology and know-how, but we're not building it to heaven. It's sinking more toward hell.

And instead of our turning to the God who became man, we're getting ready for the man who will claim to be God, the Antichrist. Since man has become the master of so many physical laws of the universe, today he thinks he can make the moral laws, but morals are not keeping up with the machinery. Arnold Toynbee

was a great historian, and he has had trouble trying to figure out how a nation as literate, as highly educated as Germany could follow for a wild man like Hitler.

And he finally arrived at this conclusion. It sounds like a preacher. There must be a vein of original sin in human nature everywhere to which Hitlerism makes a strong appeal.

The moral is that civilization is nowhere and never secure. It is a thin cake of custom overlying a molten mass of wickedness that's always boiling up for an opportunity to burst out. Civilization cannot ever be taken for granted.

Its price is eternal vigilance and ceaseless spiritual effort. I think that's a remarkable statement, and that's true. The biggest joke, it's such a sad thing, and probably that's the wrong word, is progress.

We hear a lot about it today. I'm still looking for it. When I was a boy growing up in the country, we went to church during the revival meeting, never even locked the doors where I lived.

Everything was secure. Nothing to worry about. Now I stay in motels, and they've got the lamps screwed to the table.

You heard about that woman who said, What is this world coming to? Somebody broke in our house and stole all my Holiday Inn towels. And there's no conscience about it. The business of man becoming God started in Eden.

He shall be his gods. He ends up with Antichrist, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, and that's worship, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. And the final conflict will be between, as I say, the God who became man and the man who will claim to be God.

But don't worry about man toppling God from his throne. The Almighty is patient. He may allow us to demonstrate that we're not morally capable of handling our own discoveries.

We are proving that every day we live. And one of these days, when we sit in the shambles of the wreckage we've created, God will step in and take over and say, You boys have had it long enough. Why won't people repent? I did not ask the brother to read some verses just immediately preceding the ones that he did read.

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We've piped unto you, and ye have not danced. We've mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a devil.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, but wisdom is justified over children. Then began he to upbraid the cities. We are playing in the marketplace today.

This generation is like spoiled, pampered, petulant, fussy children. Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus could please them. John was too severe, and Jesus was eating with publicans and sinners, and they didn't like either of them.

Nothing is real today, and we're playing at it. It's make-believe. Sometimes our religious services are not an experience, just a performance.

We're acting. It may be religious acting, but it's a pious masquerade, a form of godliness, a facade, but lacking the power thereof. Congregations sit on Sunday morning and listen and go out, and I think it was in this very auditorium that I heard Dr. Edmund say many years ago, when I was a young fellow and went to the Bible conference, I got so under conviction that I wanted to go to my room and pray when I heard some of that preaching.

Today we go out and say, Well, how did you like him? Somebody says, Well, he's not as good as the one I heard last year. You ought to hear Dr. Thunderbolt when he comes. How did you like him? Well, there was something like that here.

And the Pharisees were cult hypocrites, which means a play actor. They were acting. It wasn't real.

America is not about to repent, and the only other alternative is retribution. Some think God may use Russia as the Assyrian rod of His anger, as an instrument to bring America to her knees in an hour of disaster. But if New York City disappeared tonight in an atomic blast, the nation wouldn't turn to God.

I read in Revelation 9 about all those fearful judgments poured out in the sixth seal and the fifth vial, and it says, Still men repented not of their sins. When London huddled in the bomb shelters during the blitz of World War II, they tufted out and joked about it, and some of that was admirable in a way, but they didn't repent. We won't.

But in Matthew 11 there's another message, thank God, after pronouncing judgment on the three cities because they repented not, he turns from the city to the citizen and from the institution to the individual and says, whatever's going to happen to the city and to the institution, you can do something about it. He does the same thing in Laodicea. He called on that lukewarm church to repent, and it didn't.

But he said, I've got one more proposition. If anyone will hear my voice and open the door and invite me in, I'll come in. It's up with him and he with me.

My friend, whatever your city may do, you don't have to do that. You can come to me, Jesus says, and find rest. Whatever happens to America, you can live in the midst of all this bedlam, having peace with God and the peace of God, whatever your church, whatever the country may do.

And consider how beautifully our Lord put it here. Oh, the sublimity of it all in this passage. He tells us what's back of it all.

He tells us, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes, even so, Father, for it seemed good in thy sight. And in that tremendous statement, all things are delivered unto me and my Father, and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father neither knoweth any man. The Father saved the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

That's the sublimity of it. He shows us his resources before he invites us to his rest. He wants us to know what he's got to offer.

But he's got a lot to offer. All things delivered unto my Father. And then look, beloved, look at the simplicity of it.

Come unto me. You can't say that any simpler than it reads in the old King James. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

And then he gives you not only the simplicity of it, but the secret of it. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, you say, well, I thought he was going to give it to us.

Come and I'll give you rest. And the very next thing he says is, take my yoke upon you and learn of me. That's right.

It's an obtainment. You get it when you get Jesus. But it's also an experience, an attainment.

Go to my school. Become my disciple. When you enter college, that's matriculation.

They don't give you an education in a little box with a pink ribbon tied around it. You have to go several years to get that. Jesus says, be my disciple and do your homework and don't be a dropout, and you will find the life of rest for the rest of life.

It's not bondage. It's liberty. It makes the yoke easy and the burden light.

His commandments are not grievous, not a burden but something to make the burden light. It's not a load, thank God. It's a lift.

It's not weight. It's weighing. So what do we have here? Because light has come, there's a responsibility to repent.

If they won't repent, there's retribution. If they will repent, there's rest. That's the program.

Now, I know that most of you that I'm looking at right now are church people, but let me say to you that church people can sin against the light, and great is the responsibility because where much is given, much will be required. We like to boast of our greater advantages than the preachers and the churches used to have. Well, if so, we have more responsibility.

We're building bigger churches and raising more money, but we're not producing better Christians. We're not meeting the responsibility. We ought to be better preachers than we are, all of us.

I think about the old country preachers that used to come to the little church where I belonged as a boy, the horse and buggy days. They hadn't been to school, some of them. They didn't know an awful lot about books, but they knew the Lord, and they walked in the light, and they led us to Christ.

We ought to be better Christians, every one of us here, everyone listening to me, for the light we've had. When we refuse to do what we know we ought to do, we sin against the light. To him that knoweth to do good and doesn't do it, it's sin.

When we allow in our lives what the voice of our sanctified conscience condemns, we sin against the light. If you've got this morning an evil spirit towards somebody, resentment, grudge, not getting along with your husband or wife, not getting along with dad and mom, that's a sin against the light. You know better.

And when we quench and grieve the spirit, we sin against the light. When we sit in church and hear the word and don't do it, somehow we have the idea that I can do as I please about it. I'll go hear what this

preacher has to say, see if I like him.

James says if you hear it and don't do it, and I never hear anybody quote all that verse. I hear plenty of people say the Bible says be ye doers of the word and not hearers, only period. Well, that's not where the period belongs.

Deceiving your own selves. If you don't do what you hear to do from the word of God, you go out self-deceived. That's a terrible way to leave church.

It's a serious thing to go to the house of God. We're so used to it in America. Over in some lands, they jump at the opportunity and some of them don't have the opportunity.

The light shines not only in the Savior, it shines in the scriptures. You've got a Bible in your home. You can pick it up any time, get a light for your path and a lamp for your feet.

When you ignore it and let the dust gather on it, you sin against the light. I saw the other day this. When you see an old Bible that's falling apart, it probably belongs to somebody who is not falling apart.

Now, you spend enough time with it, it'll hold you together. And then the saints are the light of the world. When we reject the accumulated testimony of the saints of all the ages, when we ignore the witness of the church and the Christians in the community, we sin against the light.

People think I do as I please about church. I know we've got one down here on the corner, but I'm not going. I'm taking off in my boat.

I'll take down the road pretty soon in my car with my God behind me, my idol. And I don't have to go. Listen, that steeple pointing toward heaven down there on the corner is a reminder that we dispense the truth in here.

And we talk about the light, and you can find it if you come. And you can be that close to it and say you don't need to go. You sin against the light because there it is.

Many a man has sinned against the influence of a good old mother or the daily life of a Christian wife. That's sinning against the light. I repeat, it's not a matter of how many sins you've committed, but how much light you've rejected.

When you make it that way, the shoe's on the other foot, beloved. You can't say, well, I'll have you to know I'm not a Sodomite, I'm a Capernaumite. We're nice folks over here.

We don't do all these terrible things they do in Sodom. Listen, I just read what Jesus said about it. Sodom will fare better in judgment than these lofty Capernaumites.

They may not be guilty of vile iniquity, neither was the rich young ruler. Judas went out and it was night. Think of the light Judas had.

It'll be better for Sodomites in the judgment day than respectable, religious, cultured Capernaumites who may not violently oppose Christ. No. Capernaum didn't crucify him.

They did that at Jerusalem. They didn't violently oppose him. They did that at Nazareth.

They just did nothing. They repented not. You don't have to be a Sodomite.

All you have to be is a Capernaumite. What is your sin against the light? Spurgeon said, I tremble as I think how poverty-stricken my life has been compared with my opportunities, my soul. If Spurgeon could say that, how about the rest of us? When I think of the scriptures I could have read and didn't.

When I think of the prayers I could have prayed and didn't. The good I could have done and didn't. The souls I could have won and didn't.

The kind words I could have spoken and didn't. The burdens I could have lifted and didn't. The light I've had and not walked in it.

Oh, we sin against the light. When we don't avail ourselves of it, read it, study it, meditate therein. It's not just a matter of memorizing scripture, that's good.

But even if you don't memorize all of it, you don't know what you had for lunch two weeks ago, but you lived on the strength of it. And if you appropriated it, that's what makes the difference. Thy word have I hid in my heart.

The words that I speak unto you. And when we don't walk in it, if we walk in the light, when you don't let it shine, let your light so shine, read it and heed it and speed it and send the light as a call comes over the rolling wave, send the light, the light unto the path. That light was not given to you to look at.

You get out here today and stare at the sun and the very thing that was meant to give you light will give you blindness. And the same thing happens when you look at the truth of God. This Bible will do something to you.

You can be blinded by an excess of light. I know some people over in other lands, they're blind because they don't have it. There are plenty of people in America blind because they've had too much.

They've gone to Bible conferences and churches and read books and have never, never, never obeyed it. And they're blind. But light's not enough.

All the light in the world won't do a blind man any good. The eyes have to be open. We not only need light, we need sight.

Sinners are blind and the Holy Spirit must open their eyes. Ben Franklin admired Whitefield, the great preacher. Always thought he was the greatest preacher he ever heard.

He'd stand on the rim of the crowd and listen to Whitefield. But he never did what Whitefield was preaching about. What a responsibility.

We're not spectators and onlookers. I say to you listening to me today, you, wherever you are and whoever you are, you must do something about the inescapable Christ. It is impossible to do nothing about Jesus Christ.

You've already done something. You're lost till you're saved. You cannot be neither nor.

You say, I haven't made up my mind. Oh, yes, you have. You made it up against him.

If you haven't made it up for him, he that is not with me is against me. He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. And furthermore, you must take him for what he claimed to be and not what you think

he is.

We have a lot of sophisticates today who say, oh, I think Jesus is the greatest moral teacher and the best man, but that's as far as I go. That's not as far as he went. And you've got a built-in contradiction when you say that because Jesus Christ claimed things that no man can claim.

Before Abraham was, I am. No man cometh to the Father but by me. All things are delivered unto me of my Father.

All authority is given me in heaven and earth. The Son of the living God, flesh and blood, doth not reveal this unto thee, but my Father in heaven. C.S. Lewis wrote, and it turned Elton Trueblood around.

Elton Trueblood, the great writer. But in his autobiography, and I was so happy to see that, he said the blunt words of C.S. Lewis turned me round about when Lewis said a man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic on a level with the man who says he's a poached egg or else a devil of hell.

Either this man is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or spit at him and kill him as a demon or else fall at his feet and call him Lord. But let us not come with this patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He's not left that open to us. He did not intend to. And I want to say to you, you don't have the option of just taking Jesus Christ as a moral teacher and letting it go at that.

That's what helped turn Chuck Colson around his tracks. He said the central theme of Lewis' book and the essence of Christianity is summed up in one mind-boggling sentence. Jesus Christ is God, John 10.30. He was either God or a lunatic.

There is less heresy in rejecting him altogether than to remake him into something he wasn't and something he isn't. That's what they said when the church was having such a rough time in Gamaliel. I used to think Gamaliel was pretty smart.

He was just a straddler in the middle of the rotor. He said, well, now, let's wait and see. You know, we had Thutis and we had Judas, and they started things that didn't amount to anything.

Let's wait and see what happens. Listen, you don't do that with Jesus Christ. You don't compare Jesus Christ with Thutis.

He's not Thutis. He's not Judas. He's Jesus Christ.

No mortal can with him compare among the sons of men. Fairer is he than all the fair that fill the heavenly train. To him I owe my life and breath and all the joys I have.

He makes me triumph over death and saves me from the grave. You don't compare Jesus Christ with anybody. He's Jesus Christ.

And it will be more tolerable for a heathen in the day of judgment than folks who have had all this opportunity and say nice things about Jesus, but never really trust him. I was brought up on that old revival meeting song, O, do not let the word depart, And close thine eyes against the light, Poor sinner, harden not your heart, Be saved, O, tonight. Tomorrow's sun may never rise To bless thy long-deluded sight.

This is the time. O, then be wise. Be saved, O, tonight.

I advise you, while you have the light of day, to have the light of Christ. For this is the test, this is the crisis by which men are judged, that light has come. And men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

It is an awful thing to sin against the light that shines in the Savior and shines in the scripture and shines in the saints. So we stand, please. Our Father, we have been facing some profoundly serious things out of thy book.

And they're frightening if it were not for the fact that we can move on over into that blessed portion that says, come, and I'll give you rest. We pray that someone who has faced the inescapable Christ today may come to him and find peace. And help us Christians not to take this thing too lightly.

If we hear it and don't do it, we deceive ourselves. Send us out conscious, afresh, and anew and more serious than ever in the great danger of trifling with the light. We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

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