

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Amos Speaks Today: Thus saith the Lord - John 5:24

In the previous three talks in this series, we have been considering the message of the prophet, Amos. We saw how, on many occasions, he emphasised the authority of his message by the words, "Thus saith the LORD". In this final talk in this series, we will consider the even more authoritative words of the Lord Jesus Himself. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." John 5:24.

This verse from John's Gospel demonstrates the immense scope and power of the Word of God. In relatively few words, we have clearly and simply presented some amazing truths. These truths, which, if accepted at face value, are completely life changing and revolutionary, but at the same time they demand from us complete trust or they are just outrageous blasphemy.

"Most assuredly" or "verily, verily" is a characteristic expression in John's Gospel. This is a little strange if you ponder the way the Gospel of John opens, and also the way the Lord Jesus speaks about Himself in the Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", John 1:1. Think about it! "In the beginning was" Go back as far as you can, before the creation of the universe, before the existence of time, "in the beginning WAS". However far back you go, to the very beginning, there already "was the Word." "In beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", John 1:1.

The eternal, unchangeable Word was both with God and was Himself God. A few verses further on we read, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us", John 1:14. Clearly this is speaking of the Lord Jesus, and His own words in John 14 confirm this when the Lord said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life", John 14:6. So when, as happens 25 times in John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus says "verily, verily" or, "most assuredly" we should pay particular attention. All His words are true, vital and important, so there must be the closest attention paid when the Lord Himself emphasises what He is about to say by introducing it in this way.

The religious leaders at the time certainly realised the implication of what was being said. As we have seen this is the fourth talk in the series "Thus saith the Lord" The Jews revered and honoured the Word of God, for them it settled every matter, it was the final statement and should not be added to, but here was a man who said, "Most assuredly, I say unto you..."! How dare He! It was outrageous; it was to implicitly claim equality with God. But it wasn't outrageous, it wasn't blasphemy, the Jews just didn't realise who had come among them. The Word had become flesh and was dwelling among them!

The next clause I want to think about is "who hears my word". Having established the importance of what He was about to say, and His authority in saying it, the responsibility is now placed on those around Him, those who could "hear His word". Clearly this must mean more than just those around Jesus who could actually hear Him. Jesus often spoke to crowds of people who thronged around Him; they all "heard Him". Sound waves hit their ear drums and His voice could be heard, but did they believe Him? Elsewhere in Scripture we read, "having ears, do you not hear?", Mark 8:18, and also, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God", Romans 10:17. Physically hearing the Lord is not sufficient; our "hearing" must be blended with "faith". Having heard, or read, what the Lord has said, do we then believe it? Are we convinced it is true and reliable? Do we act upon it!

The next words to consider are, "believes in Him who sent Me". The Lord has emphasised the importance of what He is about to say, "most assuredly I say unto you..." but listening, in itself, is not enough. We might have ears but still not really hear what is being said. Our hearing must be mixed with faith. We must sincerely believe what Jesus has said but He then goes on to say that we must also "believe in" the One who had sent Him into the world.

Who had sent Jesus here? There are so many verses of Scripture that answer this question but I will just quote two of them. "The Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world", 1 John 4:14, and then, "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law", Galatians 4:4. We could also read the first few words of the Hebrew Epistle, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son", Hebrews 1:1-2. God was no longer speaking to men through intermediaries, through prophets and messengers; rather He was speaking directly to them in His Son.

It is not enough to believe that God exists, even demons believe that! (James 2:19) We must believe in Him, we must believe Him! God, the Father, has sent God, the Son, into this world, so that He can be fully manifested, or revealed. The God who has been revealed is an astonishing God! He is not some hard-hearted, distant and capricious person with unlimited power, but a Father who is kind and compassionate, loving and caring. And He has proved the reality and depth of His feelings for us, by offering His own Son as our Saviour. Do you believe this? Do you believe in such a God?

Belief and trust in God brings eternal benefits. Not just to hear the Word of God, but to believe, to trust in a meaningful way. Belief is a door through which we must enter. We can in a sense gaze through the door and yet never step through it. We might gaze at a bridge and admire its size and construction, but it is not until we step onto the bridge that we have demonstrated that we truly believed in the bridge. We are required to believe in God in exactly the same way.

So we must believe in the God who sent Jesus here to earth. What kind of God is He? The Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, has revealed Him to be a Father God, One who is kind and compassionate, the source of every good gift. But God is also described in the Scriptures as the God of resurrection, the God of almighty power, the faithful God and many, many other things. The more we find out about Him, the more we will be amazed and thankful for the great salvation He has provided for us, through His Son the Lord Jesus.

Hopefully we will also realise what is suitable for those who claim to follow Him. You try and please those whom you love, and those who love you. No one has ever loved us like the Lord Jesus, and the more we get to know God, the more we will live lives that bring Him pleasure and honour Him.

The next clause in John 5:24 reads, "has everlasting life". What is "everlasting life"? The words suggest a life that never ends, but is that all that they mean? To live forever, never having to fear death sounds wonderful, but what if our circumstances are unbearable or our health poor? What is so wonderful then? In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden there were two specific trees mentioned. We read, "The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Genesis 2:9. In taking the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in disobedience to God's word, sin was introduced into this creation. It was an act of mercy that God then prevented access to the "Tree of Life".

To live for ever and ever as a sinner, in a cursed creation was a most unhappy prospect. This God prevented. But now we have the possibility of obtaining "everlasting life" It isn't just length of days; it is that but, more importantly, it is a new quality and character of life entirely. When speaking to His disciples, Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent", John 17:3. He doesn't emphasise the duration of this life, but Jesus tells us that it is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ the sent One. To "know God" is to have a living vital relationship with God as our Father and also to have a living vital relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

John, through the Holy Spirit explains it far better than I ever can. In his first letter he writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full", 1 John 1:1-4.

Although these words were written many, many years after John had actually walked around the land of Israel with the Lord, he still has a sense of wonderment that he was privileged to see Jesus live here. John heard Jesus, saw Jesus, touched Jesus. "That eternal life which was with the Father", John says, "We saw it!" and now he writes about it so that we can enjoy it too.

Elsewhere in John's Gospel we read, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand", John 10:28-29. Here we learn that there is absolute security when we possess this quality of life. We shall never perish, and no one can snatch us out of the Lord's hand or out of His Father's hand because He is greater than all.

So when we read of eternal or everlasting life we should not just think in terms of quantity, never-ending life, but more importantly we should think in terms of quality. Jesus, in giving it to us, clearly was in possession of it Himself. He always lived His life in the enjoyment of His Father's love and good pleasure. It was a delight to Jesus to live here for Him and display that life to others. And we, if we are believers on the Lord Jesus, have been given this eternal life; it is ours now. Several verses from John's Gospel confirm this. "I give them eternal life", John 10:28. This verse that we

are considering “has everlasting life” and, of course, the most well known verse, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”, John 3:16. We have eternal life now; we don't have to wait for it!

Reading on in our verse we have, “and shall not come into judgment”, John 5:24. We have eternal life now; we are safe in the Lord's hand and we are also safe in the Father's hand. Now we are told that we shall not come into judgement. Each day the Law Lords sit in the Supreme Court of our land and hear cases and pass judgement on them. We shall never appear before the real “Supreme Court” or “God, the judge of all”, Hebrews 12:23. Our judgement has been borne by another, the Lord Jesus and we shall never have to answer to God for all our many sins and offences. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, Paul wrote, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Full stop! It is interesting that the translators of the King James Version of the Bible added, “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”, Romans 8:1. There is no good authority for this clause, but maybe to them the first statement seemed too good to be true! But the Word of God is clear “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”. What an amazing salvation we have been provided with!

The final few words of our verse read “but has passed from death into life”, John 5:24. I recently had the privilege of spending many hours at the bedside of a dear Christian lady. She had been ill for several years but remained happy and contented. I was present just moments before she passed away, leaving as someone has expressed it, the “land of the dying, for the land of the living”. To leave this world which has the stamp of death and decay upon it, for heaven and the presence of Jesus. This is a very certain truth for the Christian, but these words that we have just read together, underline the fact that the transaction actually took place many years previously, when as a young girl she heard the words of the Lord Jesus, believed on the Father God who had sent Him and so passed from death to life.

The Lord Jesus said, “has passed from death unto life”. It has happened, not it will at sometime in the future happen. We have been transferred from a condition of death to a condition of life, eternal life! We learn from Ephesians 2:1 that we “were dead in trespasses and sins”. Spiritually we had no life towards God whatsoever. A person who is dead is unable to respond to anything. As sinners we are spiritually dead and entirely unable to respond to God. We are incapable of any movement towards Him or any action that will make us more acceptable to Him. If there is any hope for us it must come from another. And this is exactly what has happened. God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, lived a perfect sinless life and was never subject to death. But nevertheless He willingly died for us, being punished by God for my sins instead of me. So now I can enjoy forgiveness, the love of God and eternal life. A hymn we used to sing reads, “Life through the death of Jesus, gift of eternal love.” I live, because Jesus died!

So the believer “has passed from death unto life”. Clearly we are still in a world that is ravaged by sin and death. Clearly, as well, we inhabit mortal bodies, bodies that are subject to death, but we also now possess a life that cannot be touched by time, death or decay. It is eternal life, and it is the only life worth having, the only life worth living. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”, John 10:10. Jesus came here to die, so that we could live! Not just exist, but live life to the full, abundant life. How He loves us! “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”, John 15:13.

So what an amazing verse of Scripture this is! “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him Who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”, John 5:24. It is believable; it carries the authority of Jesus Christ. It promises the reality of everlasting life, complete protection from judgement and condemnation and the assurance that, if we believe on God who sent Jesus, we have already passed from death to life.

But it would be wrong to just leave it there. As always, when the Word of God is read, a response is required from us. This verse tells of the most amazing blessings that are freely available to us. But whilst they are available as the Bible says to “whosoever” and can be obtained “without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1), they most certainly were purchased at incredible cost by the Giver. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”, John 3:16. Jesus the Son of God was given to die in my place, crucified on a Roman cross at Calvary, punished for the wrongs I had done so that salvation could be offered to all who would receive it.

I have accepted this wonderful gift, have you?

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