

More About Jesus, Week 31: Jesus taught to save, not condemn

by Paul Hammons

We've talked already about the judgment of Jesus - how on the one hand Jesus taught "*Do not judge*" (**Matt. 7:1**) and on the other hand also said, "*Judge righteous judgment*" (**John 7:24**). Those verses show us that the idea of "judgment" can mean different things in different contexts.

Jesus taught that we always should be people who judge in the sense that we are called to discern good and evil. We need to see the difference between good fruit and bad fruit, and we are called to draw conclusions about people based on their actions or teachings (**Matt. 7:16-18**) - marking those who are teaching false doctrine (**2 John 10**), causing division (**Titus 3:10**), or who are in rebellion to God's word (**Mat. 18:17**).

But when Jesus says, "Do not judge," he's talking about an attitude that he demonstrates in **John 12**, where he tells the Jews:

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. — Jn 12:46–47

Jesus' mission on this earth was to reveal the words that God gave him - words which were intended for our salvation if we are willing to accept them. Jesus described his goal in coming to the earth this way: "*The son of man came to seek and save the lost*" (**Luke 19:10**).

Part of that mission, though, involved showing that man WAS lost – that he was in darkness, and that the only solution to that problem was to repent and turn to Christ by the gospel.

That's why as Jesus continues his thought in **John 12**, he doesn't deny there will be a final judgment. People will be held accountable for their lives!

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. — Jn 12:48–50

Jesus' point here is that if we get to the end of our lives and find ourselves left out of the kingdom, it won't be because Jesus saw us on that day and decided to reject us. It will be because we have already rejected his teachings. As he says in **Matt. 7:23**, he will respond, "*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*"

Jesus' statements about judgment aren't contradictory, and they do not soften the warning about final judgment. Instead, they reflect the humility of Jesus. Because we know from earlier in the gospel of John that Jesus has, in fact, been given authority to judge:

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. — Jn 5:21–23

Jesus has been given authority to write in or blot out names from God's book. But Jesus emphasizes as well that his decisions are not arbitrary, and they are not done from self-will. And in fact, the judgment Jesus has been given is not "who will be condemned," but rather "who will receive life!"

Jesus' judgment involves fulfilling the promise of God to give life to anyone who has accepted the gospel, who has done what Jesus invited each of us to do: "*To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment*" (**Rev. 21:6**) – water he promises "*will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*" (**John 4:14**).

The Bible describes judgment as discernment or interpretation, but also as sentencing, determining someone's fate, classifying them as "of God" or "NOT of God." Who is written in the book of Life? Who gets to make that decision? Jesus says that decision is made impartially and fully by his words – words that were not spoken with the purpose of condemning, but of saving.

The lesson for us is in our motives for teaching the gospel to others. Are we doing it to shame them or point out their sin? Or are we doing it with the desire to bring them out of darkness and into the light? Jesus' teaching was always intended to call people to him, even knowing that it would often have the opposite effect.

Preaching the word to the lost should always be an act of grace and mercy, not of anger or desire to see someone condemned. Our hope, like Jesus' hope, should always be for salvation of the hearer!