

# The Most Terrible Words

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I want to speak to you on what I am entitling "The Most Terrible Words That Human Ears Can Ever Hear". What do you think they might be? For you husbands and fathers, it would be a terrible thing to be called away from the bench, the place of employment tomorrow, and to hear someone with a very faltering, trembling, hesitant voice on the other end of the line, break the news that by some unusual calamity your wife and children had been snatched away in a moment of time. If your ears had to receive those words, they would be terrible words. Conversely, if some of you wives heard a trembling, hesitant voice from the place of your husband's employment announcing some terrible tragedy--terrible words. Some of you fellows and girls (and I want you to know you're very much on my heart this morning, and I might say, in a real sense, three quarters of my burden is for you children, young people, teenagers) what do you think are the most terrible words your ears could hear? Wouldn't it be terrible to hear that Mom and Dad had been taken away in a moment of time, perhaps that your house had been burned down. Those would be terrible words, wouldn't they?

Job experienced something like that all in the matter of a few hours. His ears heard the acrid announcement that all of his possessions had been swept away, all of his family had been swept away. And yet I suggest that the words we're going to look at make even the words that Job heard look like kid's stuff. In fact, the words that Job heard would be good news compared to these terrible words we're going to consider this morning. And those words are found recorded in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. And I want us to look at them this morning, trusting that as we look at them as recorded in Scripture and take the warning from them, that none of us present will never hear them pronounced to us by the Lord of glory in that awful day. In other words, we're considering the fact of these most terrible words now that we might not hear them then.

Matthew 25:41: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels." I'm convinced that these are the most terrible words that your ears could ever hear. These words are terrible first of all because of the One who speaks them. These are not the words of the devil or the antichrist or some demented fiend. But these are the very words of the very One of whom it is said, "They wondered at the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth." The One who speaks these words is the One of whom it is said, "The common people heard Him gladly." It's the One who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven", the One who said to a woman taken in the act of adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." Yet this same One whose lips spoke words of grace to the amazement of the hearers, who spoke these tender words of forgiveness to a woman taken in the act of adultery, is the very One who will utter the words, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for

the devil and his angels." And I submit that these words are terrible because of the One who speaks them. For He will speak them as the exalted Lord of glory with the right to speak them and as the appointed Judge of the world with the power to carry out His sentence.

To effectively judge anyone, there must be both the right to judgment and the power to execute judgment. I've had people tell me to go to hell, and maybe you have. But it doesn't trouble me for two reasons: they have no right to make that pronouncement, and they have no power to carry it out. So sticks and stones may break my bones, but those kind of words will never hurt me. So let the whole world rise up and say in chorus, "Go to the pit." It doesn't trouble me, for they have no right to make that pronouncement, and they have no power to carry it out. But what makes these words terrible and makes me tremble inwardly to even consider them with you this morning is that the One who speaks them has the right to speak them and has the power to execute them. For He speaks them first of all as the exalted Lord of glory. Notice verse 31 of the chapter: "But when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory." He shall come in His glory seated upon a throne of His glory. And what is glory? It is the outshining of the perfections of God. When we speak of the glory of God, we're speaking of the outshining, the manifestation of the perfection of His being. And the One who speaks these will speak them as the exalted Lord of glory in the full exercise of that glory of His own Lordship and sovereignty.

Philippians chapter 2 makes clear that as the reward of His suffering and death, the Father has exalted Him with His right hand and given Him a name above every name. Ephesians 1 says He's been exalted above all principalities and power and might and dominion and every name that is named. And all authority (right to do) in heaven and in earth has been committed unto Him. So when He says, "Depart from Me", He's got the right to say it, and not only the right but the power to carry out the sentence, for He speaks as the exalted Lord of glory, the One in whom all authority and all power resides. And He speaks as the appointed Judge of the world. In John 5:22, we read: "For neither doth the Father judge any man, but He hath given all judgment unto the Son." Verses 28-29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."

Can you imagine what must have gone through the minds of some people when He was on the cross, people who remembered Him say in their hearing, "The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear My voice. The Father has given all judgment to Me." And there He is upon a cross, bowing His head in weakness, His form bruised and battered, the heavens shrouded in blackness, the disciples gone, the spittle of the angry mob dripping from His face as it mingles with His clotted blood. And they say, "Judge of the world? Look at Him. We got a little puppet court together, and by instigating the mob to cry, 'Crucify, crucify', we judged Him. And He says He's going to judge us. He doesn't even have enough power to deliver Himself from our hands, and He says He's going to deliver us from the clutches of death and the grave. Impossible!"

Paul tells us in Acts 7:31, "[God] hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained [or appointed]; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

And when the Father raised up His Son from the dead, He was saying to the world, "I have the last word now." And that open tomb in Palestine, wherever it is, is God's pledge that His Son is indeed the appointed Judge of the world. And the fact that Christ is the appointed Judge of the world is a very vital part of the apostolic Gospel, for Peter preaching to the household of Cornelius said in Acts 10:42, "And He charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is He [the Lord Jesus] who is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. [He commanded us to preach this facet of Christ's office and ministry. He is the appointed Judge of the world.]" Now when you join all right and power in one person, and that person says, "Depart from Me, ye cursed", those are the most terrible words that human ears can hear.

And then I submit in the second place that they are terrible, not only because of the One who speaks them, but they are terrible because of the number who shall hear them. If only one Hitler and one Mussolini and one Stalin were to hear those words, that would be frightful enough. For any one person to hear those words "Depart from Me, ye cursed", that would be terrible enough. But the thing that makes these words terrible and causes every sober listener and reader of them to take note is that great multitudes shall hear them. Who will hear these words when the nations are gathered for judgment before the appointed Judge of the world, the exalted Lord of glory who will come in His glory? I would suggest that all who will hear them can come under three broad categories. And I trust you will study and listen intently to see if you fit these categories, that seeing it now, you might repent and flee the wrath to come.

First of all, all impenitent violators of the law of God. Who will hear these words "Depart from Me, ye cursed"? All who openly and impenitently violate the holy law of God. For the God who made us has subjected us to His law. And that law is either found written in its remains upon the heart and conscience (Romans 2:14-15), or that law has come to us in the additional form of the written Word of God. And God didn't ask us to take a vote if we would like to be subject to His law any more than you vote about being subject to the law of this land if you're born here. If you're born here, by the very nature of your birth in this land, you're subject to its laws. And the fact that you've been born on God's earth in His moral universe subjects you to His holy law. And by nature, we are rebels against that law. Romans 8:7: "Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." And every breach of His law we commit in the working out of this disposition of enmity, God records it in thought and word and deed. And there in the court of heaven stands against all impenitent sinners the accusations of God against them, for they are breeches of His law.

And then there is that terrible disposition that produced them: this carnal mind. And all who go to that awful day with that disposition not transformed by the Spirit and that record not cleansed by the blood of His Son, all impenitent violators of the law of God will hear those terrible words "Depart from Me ye cursed." There are an abundance of passages that make this clear. I will only be selective and read several. 1 Corinthians chapter 6. The Apostle Paul is dealing with some of the problems of that church, and one of the them was immorality, impurity. And he is exhorting these professed believers to deal with those sins. And it's as though someone says, "Yeah, Paul, but suppose I don't." Well, he tells them in verses 9-10:

"Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? [If you disregard My exhortations to holiness and purity, you can mark it down as an

absolute maxim, you'll not inherit the kingdom of God. Holiness is not optional but essential.] Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

What is that class of people? Open, impenitent violators of the holy law of God. God's law says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." They say, "We shall." God's law says, "Thou shalt not steal." They say, "We shall." God's law says, "Thou shalt worship Me and Me alone." They say, "We will not." And God says in this text of Scripture that all impenitent violators of His holy law shall hear those words "Depart from Me, ye cursed."

I ask you this morning, what is your attitude with regard to His holy law? Is it one of open impenitence and indifference to the claims of your Sovereign? When He says, "Love me with the whole heart", you say, "I don't care to." When He says, "Honor My name", you say, "I don't care to." Listen, there will be people who hear these words as much for willful breach of the fourth commandment as those who will hear them for the seventh. Those who say, "Yes, God demands one day in seven to be different, but it's not convenient for me", they will perish just as surely as those who say, "Yes, God commands 'Thou shalt not commit adulterer', but it's not convenient for me." All impenitent violators of the holy law of God at any point, the Scripture tells us in the book of James, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all", for that law is a unit of expressing the mind and the will of God, not only to all those who indulge the gross sins mentioned here, but all those who indulge the refined sins (covetousness, bearing false witness, Sabbath breaking, failure to love His people).

If there are any here this morning who cannot say from the heart, "O how love I Thy law. O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes." If your heart is not bent in the direction of a serious, careful regard of the holy law of God, not to keep it in order to attain salvation--no, no, for having discovered the spiritual demands of the law, having discovered the extent of its demands, you know that that law could never save you. It's been the instrument to show you your sin, to show you your need of Christ, to make you appreciate the cross that He bore, the curse of God against a broken law. And having received full and free forgiveness, you accept that law from the hand of your Savior as a guide for your conduct in order to live to His praise. And I say to every child, every adult, every fellow, every girl, if your disposition is not that of the psalmist ("O how love I Thy law. O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes"), you're an impenitent violator of the Word of God, and you will hear these words.

Because Jesus Christ as Messiah, according to the book of Isaiah, has come, and one of His offices as Messiah is to magnify the law and make it honorable. He did it in His life. He walked in the light of the strict law of God, and He kept that law at every point. He magnified it in His own holy life. He magnified it in His death when there upon the cross, He said in essence, "Father, Thy law is so holy that when you say, 'This do and thou shalt live; this fail to do and thou shalt die', we cannot relax those demands. Father I'm willing that I shall bear the brunt of Your wrath against a broken law on behalf of those for whom I die." And the Son of God bared His breast to the Father's wrath. For what purpose? "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He magnified the law in His life; He magnified the law in His death. And listen, He'll magnify the law in His judgment. He will say to sinners, "Young man,

young woman, did you know that My law said, 'Thou shalt not; thou shalt'?" "Yes." "Why did you not regard it seriously?" "It wasn't convenient. I didn't want to. I didn't like to." He's going to say, "My Father's law says, 'The wages of sin is death.' Depart from Me, ye cursed." And as sinners sink into the pit of eternal burnings, the law of God will be magnified in its purity. The Son of God is committed to magnify the law in His life, in His death, in His judgment. And if you will not be brought by the Spirit; if you're determined to go on with the bit in your teeth saying, "I will not be subject to God and His law", then you must hear those words "Depart from Me, ye cursed."

Young people, when the temptation of your flesh begins to rage like a fire within your breast, remember, this is the issue: to make a playground out of your body now is to make a faggot of your body in the pit of eternal burning then. Never forget it. To disregard the law now is to have that law magnified in your damnation in the world to come. Terrible words because they will be spoken to all impenitent violators of the law of God.

The second segment of humanity who will hear those words are what I am calling all self-righteous moralists, those whose training and temperament and disposition and circumstances are such that they could never openly and obviously be violating the law of God. They are very moral and upright. Christ said about a people who are the epitome of self-righteous moralism, "Your lives appear beautiful unto men." Listen to what He said in Matthew 5:20: "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." You and I can't appreciate the shock this must have brought to His hearers. Here they are sitting there beneath our Lord as He preaches what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. He went up into a mountain and the multitudes gathered, and there in that crowd were, no doubt, some of these Scribes and Pharisees, the separated ones, the holy ones, the fundamentalists of their day. (Not the Sadducees. He doesn't mention them. They were the liberals.) Here was the strict sect of the Pharisees. And I wonder if the Lord Jesus even pointed to them and said to that great crowd, "Except your righteousness shall exceed theirs, you'll never enter." I can just hear the gasps: "More righteous than they? They are the separated ones. They will not defile themselves by contact with anything unclean. Just to go out to the market place and buy a loaf of bread, they wash themselves before they come back and eat. They are the separated ones, the holy ones."

What was wrong with their righteousness that Jesus said, "Except your righteousness goes beyond it, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven"? I suggest that two things were wrong with their righteousness: it rested on a wrong foundation, and it was constructed by wrong principles. What was the foundation of the Scribes and the Pharisees? Upon what foundation or basis did they seek acceptance with God? Luke 18 gives us the answer, beginning with verse 10: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican." Now listen to the words of the Pharisee: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get." Here's the key: "I thank Thee, that I am" and "I fast...I give." What was the foundation of the Pharisee's acceptance with God? He felt that what he was and what he had done would commend him to be accepted by God. He wasn't corrupt as others, and he did things that would be pleasing unto God.

And anyone in this place this morning who is building a hope for acceptance on what you are and what you've done, unless you repent and find another ground of hoping to be accepted, you're going to hear those terrible words, "Depart from Me." For all that you are the Scripture says, "In your flesh dwelleth no good thing", and "They that are in the flesh [though it be moral, religious, cultured flesh] cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). They rested on a wrong foundation: what they were and what they did. And then they constructed their practical righteousness on wrong principles. And the 23rd chapter of Matthew is a commentary of this. They were more concerned with the external than the internal. Jesus said, "You scour the outside of the platter, but inside you are full of uncleanness."

How would you feel if I invited you to our home for dinner, and you came and sat in the living room. And looking into the dining room, you saw all of the porcelain there, all of the china sparkling, looking so nice. And then the food was put on the table and you began to smell the meat and the rest. Then you were seated at the table and the blessing was asked. And then as you lifted up your head and Mrs. Martin said, "Now what would you like to drink?" And you said, "I would like coffee with my meal." And as she comes to pour the coffee in your cup, for the first time you look in and there you see dried up coffee grounds. And you see what looks to be like some food that may have been stored in the refrigerator for three weeks. And then it was just poured out just full of dead, decaying, smelly, rotten remains of past meals. What would happen to your stomach? Well, if you've got one, I think I know. That's exactly the picture Jesus gave of the Pharisees. "Looking at the outside," He said, "beautiful, but within, full of uncleanness." They were concerned about righteousness, but only externally, not internally.

In the second place, they were more concerned about details than principles. O, a Pharisee would tithe mint and anise and cumin (his spices). Jesus said he would strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. When they had wine in those days, the grapes would be thrown in an open vat, which would be a hollow stone about 4' x 6', and the men or women would tromp up and down with their feet. And the wine would be made and put into wineskins or goatskins. And then when it was to be poured out and going to be put into your glass or cup, you'd put a piece of muslin over it and pour it through the muslin so that any flies or fleas that had been picked up in the process of the open crushing might be strained out. Now Jesus said, "Here's what you people do. You strain out little gnats. And when you've got all of your gnats strained out, you turn your head to say hello to your neighbor, and a camel gets in your cup, and you drink the camel down with one big gulp." You see, He's using a grotesque figure of speech. "You strain out gnats but swallow camels." What's He saying? "You're concerned with little nitpicking details, but the great principles, you pass them over. You don't confront them; you don't walk in the light of them."

If your idea of the Christian life is, "I don't do this; I don't do that. I don't go here", and you're a stranger to the great issues of love to God, of mercy, of justice, of hunger for Him and His truth, beware, it could well be that you're a self-righteous moralist. And I'm convinced our evangelical churches are full of such people. They wouldn't be caught dead with a cigarette between their fingers or their mouth (and anyone who values his life ought not to have one there). They wouldn't be caught dead going to the theater down on Bloomfield Avenue, but, O, the inconsistency. They'll be found with a flood of stuff far worse than what might be seen in a well-selected movie pouring through their television day in and day out, defiling their own minds and the minds of their children. And they never seem to ask the question, "Is this acceptable

unto God?" "Well, it's not on the list." And their kids sniff out the phoniness, and they want nothing to do with it. Sure Mom and Dad would never defile their mouth or their lungs with a cigarette, but they will defile people's ears with gossip and unkindness. This was the problem with the Pharisees. Thankful they weren't dirty on the outside, but dirty on the inside--concerned with the little nitpicking details of religion, but missing the principles.

In the third place, they were more concerned with the eye of man than the eye of God. In Matthew 6, three times Jesus said when the Pharisees fast, when they give, when they pray, what are they concerned about? That they may be seen of men. But Jesus said, "When ye fast, when ye pray, when ye give, have one concern: the eye of your Father who sees in secret." Wherever the seeds of true holiness have been implanted in the breast of a child of God, one of the primary marks is this: there is a consuming passion to be well-pleasing unto God. And if I've got to run counter to what pleases men, so be it. I must please my God at any cost.

I wonder, as you listen this morning, does this fit the category of some of you? Self-righteous moralists, resting on a wrong foundation. You've done something. You are something. I submit to you that until you've been beat off from every foundation but Christ crucified, until you've been driven from the place of hoping anything in you will ever be the ground of acceptance to where you can say from the heart,

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,  
My beauty are my glorious dress  
Midst flaming worlds with these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head;  
Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For whom ought to my charge shall lay?  
Fully absolved from these I am,  
From sin and fear and death and shame.

These are terrible words because of all of the great number that shall hear them--all impenitent violators of the law of God, all self-righteous moralists.

Now listen to the third great segment: all deceived religionists. The Word of God speaks of people in Titus 1:16 who profess to know God, but in works deny Him. 2 Timothy 3:5 says, "holding a form of godliness...." They have all the structure of true godliness, worship, doctrine, and service but deny in experience the power. They have the form but not the power. They have the carcass but no life. They have the shell but no kernel. And they hold to the shell of true religion. Matthew 7:21-23 is a description of many of them:

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out demons, and by Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

They're going to hear those words. All who were deceived, so convinced that all was well, that not until the day of judgment do they wake up and hear those awful words "Depart from Me."

What makes a man a deceived religionist, that he can hold to the form of orthodox Christianity and still hear these words "Depart from Me"? I would suggest that it's because, in the first place, many seek the benefits of the cross without submitting to the demands of the crown of Christ. Many seek to have the blessings of Christ as Savior who want nothing to do with the demands of Christ as a Sovereign and a Lord. And because they heard that Jesus died for sinners and all who trust in Christ crucified are saved, they have snatched, as it were, at the promises of blessing from His cross, but they have willfully turned their heads away from such words as these: "He that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be My disciple." They deliberately turn their heads away from the demands of His crown: "He that loveth father more than Me, son or daughter more than Me, his own life more than Me is not worthy of Me." This is the Word of Christ. And in that terrible day, every person who comes as a religionist trying to suck sweetness from the promises of mercy flowing down from the cross but who will not bow to the implications of His crown will be found to hear those frightening words.

Salvation is in a person, and that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. And He's not received in installments. "As many as received Him [all of Him], to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Hebrews 5:9 says, "He became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation." 1 John 2:3-4: "And hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him [trusting in His blood, resting in His finished work], and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him" All those who seek the benefits of the cross without bowing to the demands of His crown will hear those words, all those who claim to believe without repenting, all those who say, "I trust" but haven't turned, for faith and repentance are inseparately joined in Scripture. Paul said He testified to Jews and Greeks "repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). In Mark 1:15, Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel."

Do you claim to believe in the Lord Jesus? Do you claim to trust in Him who died and rose that sinners might be forgiven? What do you know of repentance? That repentance so beautifully described in the shorter catechism: "Repentance unto life, that saving grace whereby a sinner out of a due sense of his sin and an apprehension, a laying hold of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after a new obedience." True repentance is always a universal thing. It respects every area of sin.

The Bible does not teach that every area of sin is immediately conquered. But it does teach that when the heart is touched with the grace of repentance, there is a disposition of hatred to all sin--Jesus said the sin that is dearer than the right hand and the right eye. For what did our Lord say? Five times it's recorded in the Gospels, "If thy eye offend thee, pluck it out." Or He says, "If you don't, you'll enter into hell." "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off. It is better to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell." What's He saying? The sin as dear as right hand and right eye must be dealt with. Why? For true repentance is universal. It respects all sin. For the truly repentant man or woman, fellow or girl, recognizes all sin opened up the wounds of my Savior. All sin is destructive. All sin is dishonoring to him. And he never takes the pen from his pocket and sneaks in a corner and signs a peace treaty with any of it. He may not know the victory that he longs for. He may at times be miserably and powerfully overcome. But even at his point of deepest defeat, he's whispering if not



shouting, "No, no, I will not sign a treaty. I will not sign a treaty." Have you signed any treaties? How about you fellows and girls? Any treaties with lies, uncleanness, pride, stubbornness, deceitfulness? How about you adults? Any treaties with temper, anger, lust, passion, envy, covetousness, gossip?

The mark of true repentance: it's universal. Secondly it's always internal. It respects the disposition of the heart and then moves out into the light. Jesus said, "Make clean first the inside of the cup." He said, "Make the tree good first and then the fruit will be good." One of the most damning, delusive practices that's gone on for years is the idea that we tell a person, "Now you admit you're a sinner. Now pray the publican's prayer after me: 'O God, be merciful to me.'" Listen, the publican wasn't giving us a point to put in a personal work book. He didn't know anybody was looking or recording his words. He came up to the temple, and as he thought of his own sin, he didn't even press to the inner court but stood afar off. And the inward pain was so great the only way that he could express it was to beat upon his breast. This was not for stage effects. He was conscious of one thing, his God. And as he thought of his God and thought of his own sin, it pained him. His repentance was internal, and the internal pressure produced the beating upon his breast. "God, be merciful unto me, a sinner."

Have you known any inward pain? True repentance involves that breaking up of the heart. That's why David said, "The Lord saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." And that's the only one He saves. And all who come to that awful day claiming to believe but are strangers to that repentance that is universal, internal, and perpetual. 2 Timothy 2:19: "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord [continually] depart from unrighteousness." Repentance is not the act of a moment, but the acquisition of an attitude. It's not the fit and start of a day, but it's a pattern of life until there's no more sin. As long as sin is around, there needs to be repentance. And if I read my Bible right, the problem of sin will be with us until that day when we look upon His face, and seeing Him as He is, we shall be like Him. So the child of God is continually marked by repentance. His repentance is not something in the memory of the past, but it's a present experience. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are they that mourn [present tense], for they shall be comforted."

Beloved, I'm dead in earnest when I ask you this morning, "Are you claiming to believe without the clear, Biblical evidences of repentance?" Then unless that decision is rectified by true repentance and faith and casting yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ, you'll hear those words, "Depart from Me." For not only will all open violators of the law of God hear it, all self-righteous moralists, but all who claim to have the benefits of the cross without the demands of the crown, all who claim to believe without repenting, and in the third place, all who profess salvation by the blood but who were not sanctified by the Spirit. For in the work of God's grace, according to Hebrews 10:15 and following and other passages, whenever the blood of Christ cleanses a man, the Spirit of Christ renews him. And the blood and the Spirit are inseparately joined in God's salvation. And in that day there were people who think they were cleansed by the blood, but what did Christ say to them?

"Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. [You had gifts, and you preached in My name. I don't contest that. You made a credible profession; that's how you came into the pale of the professing church and rose to the ranks to the place where you spoke in My name, you cast out demons in My name, you labored in My name. But though

you had ministerial gifts and success, you lacked sanctifying grace. You were still workers of iniquity.]"

I plead with you this morning to ask the question, "Has the Spirit begun His work of sanctification?" For whenever the blood cleanses, the Spirit sanctifies. Who will hear those words? There terrible because those three great segments of humanity shall hear them: impenitent violators of the law, self-righteous moralists, and deceived religionists. In short, all those who fail of true, Biblical salvation will hear those words, that salvation so beautifully described in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Wherefore if any man is in Christ..." What's the essence of true, Biblical salvation? Union with Christ. What's the effect of it? "He is a new [creation]." And what will be the fruit of it? "The old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

Having considered that these words are terrible because of the One who speaks them, secondly, terrible because of the number to whom they are spoken, they are terrible in the third place because of what will follow the utterance of these words. Will you look back at the text. What will happen after the Lord of glory seated upon a throne of glory says, "Depart from Me, ye cursed"? Verse 46 tells us: "And these shall go away into eternal punishment." Terrible because of what will follow their utterance.

Notice in the first place the certainty of the judgment to follow: "These shall go away." In time, when the Lord Jesus beckoned them through the Word and the Gospel, "Come unto Me all ye that labor", they said, "We will not come." When preachers like this one stood before them and said, "Don't be deceived. Don't trifle with your soul. Make you calling and election sure. Search your heart", they said, "We will not." And when conscience probed them and the Word pricked them and said, "Repent! Flee to Christ", they said, "We will not." And my friend, when the Lord Jesus says as the Judge, "Depart", it says they shall go. Though when He said "Come", they would not come, when He says, "Go", they shall go. The certainty of the judgment to follow: "These shall go away."

And they are terrible because of the nature of that suffering that shall follow. "These shall go away into eternal punishment." Body and soul joined together to bear the brunt of the wrath of God forever. Matthew 10:28 says, "And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Some of the most frightful words are right here: "Depart from Me." That's hell enough. Christ, the source of all light, of all love, of all purity, He says, "Depart from Me."

Can you imagine what this world would be like if it were cast out away from the influence of the sun, the source of all our earthly light, warmth, life, and sustenance of the same? To depart from the Son is to depart from the source of all life and light. And Jesus says, "Depart from Me." That's hell enough, but that's not all. It's not only "Depart from Me", but He says "into". There is a negative and positive aspect of the law of God: cut off from all light and shut up to all darkness into everlasting punishment. Terrible because the judgment that follows is certain. It's a judgment that has as its very nature the shutting off from all light and the positive infliction of all darkness.

And then it's terrible because of the duration. Notice: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." And the word "everlasting"

and "eternal" are exactly the same in the original. The translators used a little different word so it would sound better to the ear, but it's the same word. How long will the glorified saints whose record in heaven has been changed by the blood, whose rebel hearts have been subdued by the Spirit, who in time embraced the Savior and a Sovereign, who believed and repented, who were cleansed and sanctified--how long will they be in His presence? The Scripture says forever and ever. The same word is used to describe how long those who openly violated His holy law and died in that state of impenitence, those who deceived themselves, those who built upon a wrong foundation. Fuse omnipotence to wrath and then focus the two upon the head of a sinner and extend it to eternity. I dare not spend too much time even thinking about it because I think it would drive me to a state of being demented. And so I just proclaim it to you without trying to go beyond the words of Scripture. "These shall go away into eternal punishment."

As I look out into the faces of people here and think that these terrible words could be fulfilled in some of you, some of you boys and girls, some of you young people. It's a terrible thing. It will knock the giddiness out of anybody when it is soberly faced--terrible words! The very ears that have heard the Gospel from my lips could hear these words.

Then I close with my fourth point this morning. These words are terrible because none of you here need hear them. This place is prepared for the devil and his angels, and enough have already been cast off in their sins to be an eternal monument of the judgment and justice of God. But God takes no delight in the death of the sinner. He says so in Ezekiel 18. God says He has no delight in the death of the sinner but that he turn and live. God has made an adequate provision in His dear Son, the Lord Jesus, who is an able Savior. He is able to save. He's a willing Savior who says "Come", and then promises to all who come: "I will receive." God takes no delight in your death in a state of impenitence or deception or empty moralism. God has made an adequate provision in His Son.

In the third place, God has sent His saving word to you. If you go out into eternity with a clinched fist to the law of God and die in a state of impenitence, who will you blame? Will you be able to say, "O God, I didn't hear any preaching that warned me"? Listen, there are people dropping into hell beneath the shadow of pulpits all over the world who have been fed the kind of business that God's too loving to judge. He doesn't have a law that's inflexible, and no morality and religionless Christianity and all of this business. Some are fed a diet of it week after week. But you, dear people, have sat beneath the sound of the Gospel of Christ announcing God's holy law and His righteous claims and the fact that we've broken it, and we need a Mediator. If you go out into eternity a self-righteous moralist thinking that what you are and what you've done will gain acceptance, what excuse will you have? And if you go out deceived thinking you can have a Savior without a Lord, thinking that you can have salvation from wrath without sanctification from pollution, thinking you can have faith without repentance, who will you blame?

These words are terrible because none of you here need hear them. And oftentimes I wonder, when that day comes and I stand before the Lord, and all to whom I've ever preached will stand, who will I see going away from the presence of Christ into everlasting fire? I can say with all my heart I don't want to see a one of you. And the thing for which I pray and plea and which is the life and meat and drink of my ministry is to see some of you waking up from wrath to flee, hidden in the Savior's side and by

the Spirit sanctified. O, boys, girls, men, and women, I plead with you, don't rest until you know that you'll never hear those terrible words.

And if you've been able to sit here this morning and reflect and say, "Thank you, Lord. Though my repentance isn't as deep as it ought to be, I have signed no peace treaty. There is evidence of universal repentance: internal, perpetual. Thank you, Lord. I do know that You've not only blotted out the record, but You've begun something in my rebel heart", how your heart should be filled with hallelujahs that your ears will never hear those words. They could have; they ought to, but grace has intervened. A debtor to mercy alone, and may that sense of debtorhood bind our hearts to our lovely Savior and more deeply bring us beneath His gracious yoke that we may be instruments to rescue others as brands from the burnings.

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