

Last Words  
John 12:34-36

It is amazing to look at the last words of those whom we admire and love. They seem to be so much more meaningful and they have a sense of depth among them. We seem to remember the last words and the last occasion of the ones that we love and what they said. The last recorded words of Martin Luther were, **“Our God is the God who comes salvation. God is the Lord whom we escape death.”** Augustus Toplady who died at the age of 38 and wrote *Rock of Ages*, dying words were, **“I enjoy heaven already in my soul, my prayers are all converted into praise.”** The famous puritan pastor, Richard Baxter’s dying words were, **“I have pain—but I have peace, I have peace.”** John Knox said these words when he died, **“Live in Christ, die in Christ, and the flesh need not fear death.”** And of course the first Christian martyr, Stephen said, **“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”**

And the reason why I bring this up is because of our text this evening. Jesus has been discussing the anguish of his soul as he realizes that the cross is looming large. And we have the voice from heaven announcing that Jesus has glorified the Father and will glorify the Father. And then Jesus announces that he will be lifted up, and that will bring two judgments. One against this world for rejecting him. The cross and the coming resurrection will vindicate who Jesus is, and condemn all those who reject him. And also Satan will be cast out. What looks like a victory, the victory for the enemy of our souls, is the ultimate victory of Christ. Through his sacrifice we are delivered from the power of sin and the evil one, and we become none other than the children of God - citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

Now after Jesus says these things, listen to the response of the crowd to all that they have heard and also witnessed, such as the raising of Lazarus and even the voice from heaven, because unbelief is so incredible. Verse 34 says, **“So the crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’”** When they say “the Christ remains forever,” they understood that Jesus had been talking about death, and in some way his own death. But they counter that the Scriptures speak of the eternal and glorious reign of the Son of Man forever. And there are many scriptures that speak of his eternal reign. Let me give just one example in Daniel 7:13-14, **“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”** Here the Messiah is called the son of man, and he is given an everlasting dominion. And certainly he will set up that eternal kingdom at his second coming. But they never even considered passages like Isaiah 52-53 that speak of the suffering servant of the Lord.

And the reason why is they did not want a suffering Messiah who would die for their sins, but they wanted a military conqueror. And when they ask the question: “who is the Son of Man?”, it is a rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. And notice that it is the

crowds who speak this. It is the same mass of people who just proclaimed him Messiah at his triumphal entry, but now when he teaches them what he is going to die and the necessity of it, they do not want this Messiah. Now I said all of that to say this, what comes next might even seem disconnected to the question they ask, “who is Messiah,” but it is connected because their rejection of the obvious, that Jesus is the Messiah is so apparent. And what we have here in verses 35-36 is so monumental, because look at the end of verse 36, **“When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.”** What we have here are the last words that he says in public before his execution. And these last words are so significant because they are laced with so much grace toward those who had rejected him. They are words not laced with vengeance or anger or bitterness but with grace and mercy, but also so much warning to those who have hardened their hearts against him.

So these words are significant. They should cause us as the people of God to be amazed at the grace that is found in Jesus. They should broaden our love for him, but at the same time it should cause us to see the warning that as sovereign Lord he has the right to withdraw that grace from any who reject him. So let’s look at these last public words of our Lord Jesus. I want us to see the offer of grace and the also the warning.

#### 1. Jesus’s offer of grace. Vv. 35-36.

In one sense, it seems like Jesus really has ignored their question. And no doubt many in the crowd thought they might even have stumped Jesus. But Jesus knows the hardening that is going on. He knows that they are denying the reality of who he is. And we have seen the themes of darkness and light throughout this gospel. There have been analogies of both believing and unbelief, both of the person of Christ and those who oppose the gospel, both of following Jesus or following the world. And here we see Jesus employing these terms once again. And if we let the word of Christ examine our hearts and lives, it does beg the question of whether we are in light and darkness, whether we are following Christ or not? It could be we give some sort of impression at church or at school or with your friends your life has nothing to do with Christ. Or it could be that at your place of work you are more conformed to this world than you are to Jesus. But here is the grace of Christ: if you are here tonight or watching tonight, Jesus Christ is holding out his grace and saying, even though you have made all the excuses and even though you have stood against me, “come freely, there is grace for you; come to the Light.”

And look at verse 35 here, **“So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.’** So what does Jesus mean when he says, “The light is among you for a little longer”? And I do not think we have to guess or rack our brains too much to know that he is talking about himself. He has just announce his impending death, and we realize as believers he will be raised but also ascend into heaven. The greatest light is only with you a little longer. Jesus announced earlier at the Feast of Tabernacles, which really helps us see what Jesus is saying here in 8:12, **“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of**

**the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** Who is Jesus? He is the light of the world.

We cannot know how powerful this metaphor was to those in the ancient world. They had no street lights or electricity, and when the moon and stars were covered, there was no way that you could see in front of you. And we can look at the world around us, and it witnesses that there is a God, and it holds all men accountable to seek this God. But there is not enough revelation in creation to know God and to follow the true God of heaven. We need revelation. And Jesus in his personhood is the greatest revelation of the Father. We can know God and follow God through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Listen to Hebrews 1:1-3, **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”**

God has spoken in many different ways in the past, but no prophet was given all the knowledge of God. They were given some revelation here and there. And what the writer of Hebrews indicates the superiority of the revelation of the Son. Why is it superior over all that has been given? It is not that other revelation is faulty, but it is the fullness of that revelation, **“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”** He is God in human flesh. There never has been a greater light. And it shines so much more glorious in the face of so much darkness. Jesus says to the crowd, not only stop making excuses, but, “walk while you have the light.” What an incredible opportunity to hear, witness and observe the Light of life - Jesus Christ. But the meaning of “walk” is to follow and trust in what he has said and who he is. He is the light. We cannot know how to come to God or relate to him without this knowledge of Christ and his grace. Walk in light of that grace.

And look at the glorious promise in verse 36, **“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”** Believe in the light is synonymous with walking in the light. When you believe in the Light of Jesus you trust in him. You trust in his perfect sacrifice for the penalty of our sin. And here is the promise: you become what you are not. They are no longer of your father the devil. They become children of light. This is talking about the new birth. We see the contrast between the natural self and the new self in Ephesians 2:3-5, **“among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”**

In our natural selves we are children of wrath, but God being so rich in love has been gracious to us. He makes us alive in Christ. We are saved by grace. And here is the amazing thing tonight. He is extending that grace to you, even though you have played the part of the hypocrite or ran from him or mock and scorned him, He is in

great love says come - there is grace for you. Come and you will be a child of light. It is such a glorious and grand promise. Don't waste that grace tonight, because the text here says, "While you have the light." There is a time where this grace will not be made available to you. And that is where we come to the second point.

## 2. Jesus offers a warning. Vv.35-36.

There are many pastors that do not want to be known as scare preachers. You know what a scare preacher is? He talks about hell, fire, and brimstone. He makes known as graphic as possible that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And certainly some preachers can only talk about judgment without grace, and that certainly is not the gospel. But here is the thing: Jesus was a scare preacher. He talked about the horrors of the coming judgment than he did about heaven.

Here is just a small sampling of verses and warnings from the lips of Jesus. Matthew 7:19, "**Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**" Mark 9:43-45, "**And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.**" Matthew 25:41, "**Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'**" Matthew 10:28 even uses the word fear, and it should create a terror, "**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**" Ed Welch says that John Calvin said of this text that it makes the hairs on the back on your head stand on end.

And the warning here is rather stark and bleak given to those in the crowd that were hardening their hearts at the grace and light of Christ may not always be available to them. I talked to someone once and they said they might come to Jesus later in life, but didn't want to right now. That is a popular sentiment among young people. And there are two lies. One is that Jesus is out to destroy your life and take all the fun out of it. And here is the thing: there is more joy in knowing and walking with Christ than anything this world could ever offer. But the other lie is equally as damning. And it is this one that Jesus is addressing in this text, and that is that you have the power to control the timing of your coming to Christ. You have the power to determine the time and circumstances of when you will come to the light of Christ. Jesus says here in verse 35, "**The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.**" Notice the light here is only a little while. That witness of the light does not last and Jesus is under no obligation to keep offering his grace. The warning is that if you refuse to walk in the light, in other words, trust Jesus, the darkness will overtake you. You might have been excited by Jesus but slowly and methodically the darkness begins to shroud you. The darkness will become a habitual way of life. And the amazing thing about spiritual darkness is that it is different than physical darkness. Someone who is in physical darkness knows that they cannot see. But those in spiritual darkness as Jesus says, "does not where he is going." He thinks he does. He thinks he is in control while rejecting Christ. He might even have a sense

of peace. He does not know he is on that broad road that leads to destruction. It is only the light of Christ that can show the path to Christ. It is only trusting in him that one has eternal life. If you reject him then you have no light. Don't let the darkness over take you.

Look at verse 36 again, because there is something that easy to miss here, **“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”** When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.” Notice the beginning the beginning of the verse says, “while you have the light.” Now what does that mean? And it is certainly talking about his death, and resurrection, and ascension into glory, but there is more here. God again is under no obligation to keep offering that light. Right after this gracious offering we read **“When Jesus’s had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.”** Notice that there is a hiding of Jesus from them. Who is the them? It is the crowds who had just challenged him that he was not the Messiah. And these words are the last words that Jesus speaks in his public ministry. The next time the crowds will see him is when he is beaten. They will choose a known criminal to set free and cry out crucify Him. No public offer of grace comes from Jesus to the crowds. This is a judicial withdrawal of his grace. The words of John 8:21 are coming to pass, **“So he said to them again, ‘I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.’”** D.A. Carson explains, **“by his withdrawal, his self-conscious hiding from the people, he is acting out the judicial warning he has just pronounced.”**

This is such fearful and weighty stuff. Listen to Hebrews 3:15, **“As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’”** I implore and beg you through the mercies of God, if you are hearing the call of Jesus and his saving grace, don't harden your heart. As we see in this text, Jesus judicially hid himself from them. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to follow him. Imagine in that coming time when the books are opened and it is made so apparent that you deserve eternal punishment in that fire that never stops, and you realize that God's grace was offered. Jesus was presented and came with the necessary grace and all you had to do is believe and follow him, but you refused. Imagine knowing that through all eternity. Don't take his grace for granted. Don't take the hardening affect of darkness lightly. Today is the day of grace.

And for us as believers. We are as the text says, “children of light.” We are to reflect that light of Jesus. And remember, one of the chief ways that we reflect that light is doing exactly what Jesus does in this text, and that is offer grace to those who are in darkness and do not even know it. Individuals because of the hardness and darkness of their hearts do not realize the true need of Jesus. But listen to the promise and challenge in Romans 10:13-14, **“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”** The promise is any and everyone that call on Christ will be saved. But how will they be saved if they do not hear? God sends the children of light to speak of the light and testify of that light. We need to audibly make known Jesus - the light and hope of the world. Who in your life has God needs to hear that message.

Time is short. Let us make the most of our time to make known Christ.