

5. John closed out his treatment of Jesus' public ministry with a series of statements by the Lord Himself (12:44-50). While some have viewed these statements as a single, historical discourse, several considerations suggest that they represent a summary compilation of content which was fundamental to Jesus' self-presentation to the children of Israel.
- The first thing that points in this direction is John's previous assertion about Jesus withdrawing and hiding Himself after addressing His disciples and those gathered with them (12:36).
  - As well, John mentioned no occasion or circumstance related to Jesus' statements in this passage. To the contrary, he presented them without any situational context whatsoever, as if they existed in abstraction. In itself this manner of presentation creates the impression of a summary compilation rather than an historical episode, but the form of John's overall account reinforces this conclusion. For if Jesus delivered these statements as a single discourse, this is the only time John recorded such a discourse without identifying the setting in which Jesus spoke (ref. 3:1-21, 4:1-38, 5:1-47, 6:1-65, 7:1-8:59, 9:1-10:18, 22-38, 12:12-36).
  - So also these statements explicitly echo content present in the discourses John previously recorded, again giving the impression that he wanted his readers to view this passage as a summary compilation of Jesus' teaching and message.
  - Finally, this passage forms the parallel, complementary counterpart to 12:37-43 in which John summarized Israel's unbelieving response to Jesus' self-disclosure. The intentional parallelism between these two passages suggests that the same summarizing dynamic applies to both.

Thus it seems clear that John intended this larger context as his closing summary of Jesus' public ministry. Moreover, he presented it in terms of its two dimensions: Jesus' self-presentation to Israel and Israel's response to Him. One would have expected him to treat them in that order, but he did the opposite, leading with Israel's response and then concluding with a brief synopsis of Jesus' self-disclosure and exhortation to the nation. It appears he did so to spotlight Israel's unbelief, but specifically as it was the response of Yahweh's covenant people to Him. *John constructed His summary of Jesus' self-presentation in such a way as to emphasize that, by refusing Him, Israel was rejecting its covenant Lord and Father and, therefore, its own identity and calling.* Whether speaking of Jesus' person, purpose, words or work, John was careful to intimately connect Him with His Father (12:44-50); Israel's response to the one was their response to the other.

- a. Jesus' *person* was the first point of John's correlation: To behold the Son is to behold the Father and to embrace the Son in faith is to believe the Father. Jesus had come into the world as the Father's *light* – His tangible and clear revelation, and it was only by discerning and embracing that light manifest in Him that men would escape the darkness of their alienation and unbelief and attain the goal of their created identity as image-bearing "sons of light" (12:44-46; cf. 1:1-9, 8:12-19, 9:5, 12:30-36; ref. also Ephesians 5:1-14; Philippians 2:14-16).

b. John's second point of correlation involved Jesus' *words* (12:47-50). As the incarnate Logos, Jesus fully embodied Yahweh's self-disclosure in the world and to the world. As such, He was the human embodiment of God's person, but also of His purpose, will and work. (Recall the prior treatment of the Logos concept in which it was shown that the Logos was God's *word* in the sense that it manifested and made effective in the world His being and will. Thus the Logos was the mediating agency between the Creator and His creation. )

- Jesus fulfilled the Logos' substance and function by embodying God's person, will and work as the divine Image-Son (Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3). Thus His words – His "sayings" which He proclaimed to Israel concerning Himself and His mission in the world – were the words of the One who sent Him (cf. 7:16). Jesus' words were His Father's, not so much in the sense that He said the things His Father told Him to say, but in the sense that He was the *Word become flesh* (1:14); Jesus, as true man, was God's coherent and complete communication to His world.
- And just as God, prior to the incarnation of the Logos, gave His utterances substance, shape and life by His corroborating and interpreting works, so Jesus enacted His own words – the words of His Father – in the testimony of His life and works. Together, Jesus' person, words and works testified truthfully and exhaustively of Israel's God (1:14-18, 5:19, 30, 8:30-56, 10:30-38, esp. 14:1-10).

*"He so lives out his life that from beginning to end he is one person, and his work in the flesh is one with his being the Son of God. He so lives that from beginning to end his actions are not different from his innermost heart, or to put it the other way round, he so lives that the course of God's action towards man is identical with his own existence in the flesh. There is no gap between realm of truth and realm of event here. He is the truth; he does the truth; he speaks the truth; he enacts the truth in physical flesh, and what he does in the flesh he is in himself, in his own person. His action is his presence in act. His word is his life in his speaking and living of it. In this absolute unity in Christ, God steps among men and women and gives himself to be known in act which is identical with his own person, in activity in which he is fully present, bodily present, in action which issues out of his innermost being and heart. That act of the ever-living God is identical with Jesus... In Christ, what God communicates to man is not something, but his very self. (T. F. Torrance, Incarnation)*

These considerations highlight the crucial sense in which Jesus' words are to be regarded as *true*. In the biblical conception, truth exists where word and deed converge and coincide; Jesus was the fullness of truth because He was Yahweh's word embodied and enacted. His words were true, not merely because they were factually correct (which they were), but because they expressed and fully conformed to the person and works of the One who is true – both the Son who was sent (1:17, 7:18) and the Father who sent Him (7:28, 8:16, 26).

Jesus' words are true, and for that reason that they will stand to *judge* the world on the last day (12:48). At other times He'd indicated that His Father had given all judgment to Him (5:22-30; cf. Matthew 25:31ff); here (and elsewhere) He insisted that He would not judge men, but that His words would perform that task (12:47, cf. 5:45-47). The most common answer given to this seeming contradiction is that both are simultaneously true. That is, Jesus Himself will judge all people on the last day, but He will do so through His words, and that in two respects: He will *call* everyone to account for their response to His *revealed word* and then *pronounce* judgment upon them accordingly (cf. Acts 10:34-42, 17:30-31; Romans 2:1-16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; cf. also Revelation 19:11-16).

But the preceding considerations point toward a more precise way to understand Jesus' declaration that His words will judge the world. Again, truth exists where word and deed coincide – that is, where the inner reality expressed by an utterance is actualized in a corresponding act or event. (Accordingly, the plural form of the Hebrew noun *word* can denote *history*.) This principle has its ultimate realization in Jesus the Messiah: *Every divine utterance and every interpretive action or event from the time of creation converges to have its substance and meaning in Him*. This is precisely what Jesus (and His disciples) meant by insisting that all of the Scripture (which embodies word and event) testifies of Him. So this dynamic is fundamental to the doctrine of scriptural veracity: The Scriptures are true, not merely because of factual correctness, but because they are a truthful witness to the One who is true. From this vantage point, Jesus and His words are simultaneously the final judges of men for the simple reason that He and His words are effectively identical; in Him, word and event coincide to reveal truth, whether as the incarnate Logos – the *Word* become *flesh* – or the One whose own words perfectly correspond to His person and works.

Two related implications follow: First, if faith must be directed toward what is true, and truth is revealed in the coincidence of word and event, then faith in Jesus involves discerning and owning the simultaneous, identical truth of His person, words and works. And since faith in Jesus is grounded in truth in this sense, a person can be guilty of unbelief even if he believes (embraces as true) the words which Jesus spoke or accepts historical facts about Him (such as His crucifixion and resurrection). This was exactly John's concern in addressing "believing unbelief" in Israel; to the extent that Jesus' countrymen didn't correctly correlate His person, words and works, they fell short of the truth and of authentic faith.

Jesus declared that His words will judge men, but this judgment pertains particularly to the matter of *eternal life*. He had come into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it (12:47, cf. 3:17). He came that men should find life in Him – the divine life which inheres in Him as true Image-Son; the life which God intended man to share with Him (17:1-4). Jesus' words are true as "living words" (6:63) – words expressing truth pertaining to the divine life and its relation to men, but which also the Spirit empowers so as to convey that life (6:63). Thus rejecting them leaves the hearer in the darkness of death unto final destruction.