

THE WORD SAVES

DEVOTIONAL READING: [John 12:44-50](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [John 12:27-50](#)

JOHN 12:44-50

44 Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. **45** The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. **46** I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

47 “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. **48** There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. **49** For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. **50** I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”



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KEY VERSE

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.—[John 12:46](#)

PARTNERS IN A NEW CREATION

Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the relationship between the Son and the Father as Jesus explained it.
2. Explain the interrelationship between salvation and divine judgment, as far as Jesus presented it.
3. Recruit an accountability partner for greater action on the commands of Jesus.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Standing Before the Judge
- B. Lesson Context

I. On Belief (John 12:44–46)

- A. Seeing (vv. 44–45)
- B. Abiding (v. 46)

Turn on the Light!

II. On Judgment (John 12:47–50)

- A. Timing (vv. 47–48)
- B. Declaring (vv. 49–50)

Gloves Off!

Conclusion

- A. The Word Saves
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Habakkuk Huh-*back*-kuk.

Nicodemus *Nick*-uh-dee-mus.

Philippians *Fih-lip*-ee-unz.

Introduction

A. Standing Before the Judge

I walked into the police station so they could take my fingerprints. The process was intimidating, but necessary for the legal proceedings. Police officers on duty asked for all my personal information, shot several photographs of me, and took detailed prints of my fingers.

My interactions with the law continued over the next year. I was required to attend court hearings where I would stand before a judge and plead the particulars of my case. Some courtrooms were larger than others; but in each one, crowds of people heard me and heard the details of my case. Each hearing was a nerve-racking ordeal.

My family was active in each appearance, and I hoped that someday we would all be united. Lest you misunderstand, I wasn't accused of any crime. My wife and I were going through the tedious process of adopting a child born in a different country.

Throughout the whole process, we followed the guidance of the family court judges and our lawyers. Even if we didn't understand the *why* behind something (like getting our fingerprints), we followed through because we wanted our family to be united. Ultimately our patience and resolve paid off! Our growing family now includes a new child.

The whole experience served as a reminder to the importance of belief and faith. We had to believe the adoption process would be resolved so long as we faithfully followed the directives of the authorities. If we disregarded their directives, the entire process might end abruptly without the completion. Jesus had strong words regarding belief and faithfulness. His words have eternal consequences, more serious than from any judge or lawyer.

B. Lesson Context

After a notable introduction ([John 1:1–50](#), see [lesson 5](#)), John's Gospel focuses on the bulk of Jesus' public ministry: his miraculous works and teaching ([2:1–11:57](#), see [lesson 6](#)). In this section of the Gospel, John recorded seven accounts of Jesus' miraculous acts and seven accounts of Jesus' teachings. Together they highlight the way Jesus showed his mission to the world, a mission given by his heavenly Father.

But throughout this section of the Gospel, Jesus' audiences were unable and unwilling to accept his teachings. They saw his miracles and enthusiastically received him. However, far too often they failed to rightly understand his teaching (see [John 6:14–15](#), [42](#), [52](#)). Jesus did not fulfill the hopes and wishes they desired from a savior or messiah. As a result, many stopped following Jesus ([6:60–66](#)). Despite seeing and hearing Jesus, belief was not always present.

Today's Scripture text marks a transition to a third section of the Gospel. This section tells

of the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection ([John 12:1–20:31](#)). Given that half of John's Gospel is dedicated to the events of Jesus' final week, there can be no doubt of John's focus. A Savior who does miraculous acts and provides eternal teaching is nothing without the events of the Passion Week.

This lesson's Scripture text serves as Jesus' final public discourse to his generally unbelieving audience. Immediately prior to this text, John provides some editorial context surrounding the teaching. John cites the words of the ancient prophet Isaiah in order to frame the situation Jesus faced ([John 12:37–38](#); see [Isaiah 53:1](#)). Even as Jesus performed many miraculous acts, there were people who failed to believe and follow him.

This reality was highlighted in the nature of Jesus' coming into Jerusalem. Many people celebrated his entry ([John 12:12–19](#)), but there would be other people who would call for his crucifixion several days later ([19:1–6](#)). As a result of their unbelief, many people would experience certain consequences and judgment ([12:40](#); see [Isaiah 6:10](#)).

I. On Belief

([JOHN 12:44–46](#))

A. Seeing (vv. 44–45)

44. Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.

Having gone into hiding (see [John 12:36](#)), Jesus reappeared and *cried out*. Perhaps his urgent statement was directed to the “many even among the leaders [who] believed in him” ([12:42](#)).

John's Gospel details two other instances when Jesus cried out in exhortation ([John 7:28, 37](#)). With this language, John evokes an image of a town herald declaring the latest news of the kingdom and the intentions of the king (compare [Daniel 3:4](#); [Habakkuk 2:2](#)). In a sense, today's Scripture marks the final exhortation for an unbelieving audience. For this audience, Jesus spoke out—as with the proclamation of a herald—on the importance of proper belief.

Further, by describing Jesus' declaration in this manner, John may have been drawing from ancient wisdom texts as a framework to describe Jesus' proclamation. The book of Proverbs describes Wisdom, embodied as a woman, crying out to any person who might hear her words (see [Proverbs 1:20–21](#)).

The message that Jesus brings is greater than the message of Wisdom as described in Proverbs. John reminds his audience that Jesus has brought the greatest news of human history. Jesus cries out, yet few people listen or understand (see [John 12:40](#)).

The concepts of belief and resulting action from belief serve as Jesus' main point. If a per-

son *believes in* him, then that person also believes in God the Father. This statement equates Jesus with God the Father. To believe in Jesus means to *believe in the one who sent* Jesus: God the Father ([John 14:1, 6–7](#)). As a result of proper belief, a person would experience life change.

To be sent by God speaks of Jesus’ authority, power, and honor ([John 5:23](#)). Jesus’ words are the same words as of the Father. Therefore, Jesus’ words carry the authority of the Father ([7:16; 8:28](#)). Since God sent Jesus, the world must listen to Jesus. His teachings point to the life in God because “whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” ([2 John 9](#)).

The concept of belief is a central theme of John’s Gospel. John wrote so that people would believe that Jesus is the Son of God and, thereby, receive life ([John 20:31](#)). One cannot reject Jesus’ teachings but claim to follow God. If a person rejects Jesus, they also reject God (compare [14:24](#)).

45. “The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

The Old Testament describes Moses’ unique relationship with God. The Lord God “knew” Moses as if they were “face to face” ([Deuteronomy 34:10](#)). However, Moses could not see God directly ([Exodus 33:20](#)). God permitted Moses to see only part of him ([33:23](#)). Despite Moses’ unique relationship with God, no person would dare claim that to see the face of Moses was the same as seeing God himself.

However, in Jesus, God had come and was present among humanity. The glory of the Son was the same glory as of the Father ([John 1:14](#)). When a person looked at Jesus, they were also seeing God—*the one who sent* Jesus to earth (see [14:9](#)). But mere physical vision is not enough; a person must believe. Seeing *and* believing in the Son of God must occur for the future resurrection and eternal life (see [6:40](#))!

What Do You Think?

What things prevent people from seeing God and his work in the world?

Digging Deeper

How might Jesus’ teaching found in [Matthew 5:3–14](#) inform believers on the ways they can show God to the world?

B. Abiding (v. 46)

46. “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

For people to see clearly and know the direction they are headed, they must have light. Jesus declares himself to be the one who will cast spiritual *light* for *the world*. The totality of his person and work has been to provide spiritual light to each person *who believes in* him. As

a result, the spiritual lives of his followers are illuminated. Following the will of God is doable as the light of Jesus shines on his disciples.

The binary of light and darkness is a dominant theme in the writings of the apostle John. He describes the Son of God as being the Word of God that gives witness to God's light (see [lesson 5](#) on [John 1:7–9](#)). Additionally, Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world ([8:12](#); [9:5](#); [12:35–36](#), [46](#)). Jesus bears God's light and is light in himself. John desired that his audience believe in the light and live in a manner that reflects this spiritual light (see [1 John 1:5–9](#)).

The spiritual light of Jesus exposes the dark ways of the world. Further, spiritual darkness is unable to overcome this spiritual light ([John 1:5](#)). People who *stay in darkness* and embrace the evil of the world are unable to believe in Jesus (see [3:19](#); [1 John 2:9–11](#)). Only Jesus can provide the light of spiritual life for people to see their dark ways ([John 8:12](#)).

Jesus has the power to give light to all people who wish to see clearly. This includes physical and spiritual vision (see [John 9:1–41](#)). While some people wander in spiritual darkness, people who believe in Jesus and his words receive spiritual light. As a result, their lives are illuminated by Jesus' teachings, and they align with God's intentions for the world. When disciples experience the spiritual light of Jesus' teaching, they can guide others to glorify the Father (see [Matthew 5:16](#)).

The process of growing as a disciple of Jesus, known as discipleship, is predicated on remaining in and keeping Jesus' teaching ([John 8:31](#)). When disciples follow him and his teachings, they show their love for him ([14:23–24](#)).

Further, Jesus' words bring spiritual renewal and cleansing ([John 15:3](#)). Ultimately, discipleship in the way of Jesus leads to eternal life ([8:51](#)). This hope finds its basis on the words of Jesus, words that bring life ([6:68](#))! Discipleship and the words of Jesus go hand in hand ([14:15](#)). Disciples follow the way of their heavenly master!

What Do You Think?

What approaches to evangelism have you found to be most effective for calling people from spiritual darkness into the light of Jesus Christ?

Digging Deeper

Who will you next invite to accept the light that only Jesus Christ can bring?

TURN ON THE LIGHT!

Flip a light switch in your kitchen, and the overhead light will come on automatically. Open your refrigerator door, and its light will illuminate the contents therein. Step outside during a midsummer afternoon, and the summer sunlight will beat down on your skin. The presence of light is so commonplace that we take it for granted in our daily lives.

Light’s illuminating nature grows more powerful when many smaller lights are combined. On a clear summer night at my childhood home, the glow of the nearby large city—located 50 miles away—was evident on the horizon. The many lights of the city combined to cast an ethereal glow in the sky surrounding my home.

Scripture uses the concept of light as a metaphor for the ways of God. The Word of God is described as a light that illuminates the psalmist’s spiritual walk ([Psalm 119:105](#)). God’s people are described as being like light, serving as a beacon for a spiritually dark world (see [Matthew 5:14–16](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:5](#)). Even God and his salvation serve as light for the world (see [Psalm 27:1](#); [John 1:4](#); [1 John 1:5](#)). How are you letting the light of God shine forth to your family, friends, and neighbors?

—D. F.

II. On Judgment

([JOHN 12:47–50](#))

A. Timing (vv. 47–48)

47. “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

Early in Jesus’ adult ministry, he interacted with Nicodemus the Pharisee. Nicodemus was confused regarding the nature of Jesus’ ministry. Nicodemus could only suppose that Jesus was merely a teacher from God ([John 3:2](#)).

However, Jesus was more than a mere teacher. In fact, Jesus declared his purpose on earth as God’s Son. He came not to “condemn the world” but to provide salvation for the world ([John 3:17–18](#)). In this sense, Jesus’ task while on earth was to declare the *words* of his heavenly Father so that all people might hear him, believe in him, and have everlasting life ([3:16](#)).

Further, Jesus made clear that in this moment he would not *judge* a person who failed to believe in Jesus and *keep* his commands (see [John 8:15](#)). God’s purpose for Jesus is to bring salvation to the world. The opportunity remains for people to repent and receive forgiveness.

However, this statement does not mean that Jesus will never render judgment. As the Son of Man, he has the authority to do so ([John 5:27](#); [9:39](#)). Is Jesus so confused about his mission that he contradicted himself regarding his acts of judgment?

On further investigation, this difference can be resolved by thinking about the varied kinds of judgments. At God’s appointed time, all humanity will face judgment ([Acts 17:31](#); [Romans 2:16](#); [1 Corinthians 4:5](#)). Jesus’ first coming to earth was not the time for that. Then (and now!) Jesus desires *to save the world*. This salvation will occur as people repent of sin, believe in him, and follow the plan of salvation as the New Testament expresses it. There will

be a time for eternal judgment. But in this moment, Jesus had come to bring the light of eternal life.

What Do You Think?

How might believers be not only hearers of God's Word but also doers of his Word?

Digging Deeper

What obstacles prevent you from following God's Word?

48. “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.

Jesus acknowledged that not all people will follow him as a disciple. Some will reject him and will *not accept* his *words* of teaching (see [Luke 10:16](#)). For those who have rejected him, Jesus' *words* will be their judge and *will condemn them* (see [John 5:30](#); [8:16](#)).

The themes of Jesus and the Word have a heavy emphasis in John's Gospel. In the famous introduction, John identifies Jesus as the Word ([John 1:1–5, 14](#); see [lesson 5](#)). Further, Jesus is portrayed as emphasizing the importance of hearing and believing his words ([5:24](#)). While some people followed Jesus after they saw his power on display, many people turned away from Jesus because of the demanding nature of his words ([6:60](#)).



Visual for [Lessons 5 & 7](#). Show this image as you discuss the *Digging Deeper* question associated with [John 12:46](#).

The timing of the final judgment is unknown. In John's Gospel, *the last day* refers to the future bodily resurrection of believers (see [John 6:39–40](#), [54](#); [11:24](#)). In this instance, Jesus speaks of the last day as a day of judgment for unbelievers. But he also spoke of a day when all people would be judged—believers and unbelievers (see [5:28–30](#)). How a person regards the words of Jesus will dictate their eventual judgment.

Discipleship is predicated on remaining in Jesus' word ([John 8:31](#)). Love for Jesus is demonstrated by keeping his word ([14:23–24](#)). Cleansing is effected by means of Jesus' word ([15:3](#)). Eternal life is contingent upon keeping Jesus' word ([8:51–52](#)). Jesus' word is, in fact, the point of division between those who follow him and those who don't, those who are in Christ and those who are not ([6:60–66](#); [10:19](#)). Jesus' true disciples are those who confess and believe that he has the words of eternal life ([6:68](#)).

What Do You Think?

How are the concepts of hearing, belief, and judgment connected as represented in [John](#)

How might [James 1:22–25](#) inform the importance of your obedience to God’s commands?

B. Declaring (vv. 49–50)

49. “For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.

The words that bring life and judgment are *not* only spoken by Jesus, but come from his heavenly *Father who sent* him (see [John 6:38–40](#); [8:26](#)). The Father sent Jesus with a particular task, part of which included that he should *speak* and teach the Word of God ([7:16–17](#)).

The exact nature of that which the Father *commanded* Jesus *to say* is not immediately evident from this text (compare [John 14:31](#)). However, Jesus previously spoke of his authority—given to him by his heavenly Father—to “lay down [his] life—only to take it up again” ([10:17](#)). Jesus’ words would eventually lead to this unavoidable fact. As Jesus willingly declared his Father’s intentions for the world (see [5:18](#); [18:19–23](#), [33–37](#)), his death would become a reality.

Jesus’ time on earth is a perfect example of humble submission and obedience to his heavenly Father (see [Philippians 2:8](#); [Hebrews 5:7–8](#)). Through his obedience, Jesus was faithful to his Father—he spoke only what his Father commanded of him. Therefore, he calls his disciples to follow him with love and faithfulness ([John 14:21](#); [15:10](#)).

This background reinforces the urgency in needing to respond to Jesus’ teaching. To reject Jesus’ Word is the same as rejecting the entirety of the Word of God. The Father sent his Son to the world and provided a specific task: speaking the words concerning salvation for the world.

50. “I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

All of Jesus’ work, as well as John’s purpose in writing his Gospel, has eternal life as its ultimate objective. Jesus did not only come to bring physical healing, but also spiritual life. By obeying the Father’s *command*, Jesus made *eternal life*—physical and spiritual—available to humanity.

Jesus’ faithfulness in following the command of his heavenly *Father* gives opportunity for humanity to receive this life. The reception of this life starts with and requires belief that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to the Father ([John 14:6–7](#)). For disciples who adhere to this belief and follow the New Testament plan of salvation, a new life will result (see [3:15](#); [5:24](#), [39–40](#); [6:40](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Ephesians 2:8–9](#); [James 2:14–26](#); etc.).

Jesus bears light to all who would believe. Belief in Jesus leads to spiritual cleansing and

renewal ([John 15:3–4](#)). A person can't claim to be a disciple of Jesus and not obey him and his Word. Disciples of Jesus “live in him” and so they “must live as Jesus did” ([1 John 2:6](#)).

What Do You Think?

What is an example of God's commandment from Scripture that you will recommit to following in the coming week?

Digging Deeper

How might a particular fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22–23](#)) provide the necessary mindset so that you can follow God's commands?

GLOVES OFF!

The final buzzer sounded, and Indianapolis Colts linebacker Darius Leonard was elated. His superb defense had helped his team win a victory against the Minnesota Vikings. As he left the field, Darius removed his game gloves and haphazardly tossed the gloves to a young Colts fan in the stands.

Once in the locker room, Darius realized that his wedding ring was missing from his hand. Concurrently, the young Colts fan realized he had received something much more valuable than mere football gloves; he had inadvertently received gloves *and* a wedding ring! With the help of his family, the young fan returned the wedding ring, much to the relief of Darius and his wife.

Some items are too precious for us to lose—or so we think. The truth, however, is that nothing of this earth can be retained forever. The ultimate (and only) “item” that's too precious to lose is the Word: Jesus Christ. Through God's revelation in him, the world has been given the ultimate gift. His words lead to eternal life. What earthly thing are you tempted to replace him with?

—D. F.

Conclusion

A. The Word Saves

After this teaching, Jesus' public interactions would be greatly limited. He would celebrate Passover with his disciples ([John 13:1–30](#)) and give them his final teaching ([13:31–16:33](#)) before his trial and crucifixion. Therefore, we can look at Jesus' teaching as his final public teaching (and warning) on the saving nature of his Word.

True belief requires confession that Jesus is Lord and a life change resulting from that

confession. Disciples of Jesus prioritize obedience as his light directs their actions. In Jesus' time, many people saw God's miraculous power at work in him. But when time came to listen and obey his words, many people stopped following him. For this reason, Jesus taught of the necessity of belief and of judgment.

Later in John's Gospel Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands" ([John 14:15](#)). Love is demonstrated by right belief and hearing and obeying Jesus' words. All believers must faithfully abide in Jesus' words. In the future, his words will judge all humanity. Disciples love and follow him!

Jesus' words will transform us and lead us into a life that bears the fruit of obedience (see [James 2:14](#)). Jesus has brought spiritual light into the world. Will you receive it?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we want to faithfully listen to and follow the words of your Son. Show us how to make his word primary in our lives so that it will transform us. Remove any distractions that prevent us from faithfully obeying your Son. Reveal to us how we might live as a witness to your salvation. In the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus brings spiritual light!

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, find four recipes from a cookbook. Rewrite the recipes on their own handouts, but omit or substitute a key ingredient or procedure. (Make sure that the omission or substitution is obvious for even the most unskilled cooks!)

Divide the class into four groups and distribute a recipe handout to each group. Have each group evaluate their recipe and look for omissions or substitutions. After five minutes, ask each group to state their recipe title, any omissions or substitutions, and how they might correct the recipe.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Many people have so-called recipes for a flourishing life.

Yet too many of these recipes miss the most important ingredient. As a result, their life is lacking.”

Into the Word

Announce a Bible-marking activity. Provide copies of [John 12:44–50](#) for those who do not want to write in their own Bibles. Provide handouts (you create) with these instructions:

- Write an equal sign above every phrase that affirms that Jesus is equal to God.
- Draw a star above every phrase regarding belief.
- Write an exclamation point above every phrase that deals with judgment.
- Underline any word or phrase that you find difficult to understand.

Read the Scripture aloud (or ask volunteers to do so) slowly at least twice and as many as four times. As the Scripture is read, class members are to mark their copies in the ways noted.

After the final reading, divide class members into four groups for class discussion. Provide each group a handout with the following possible statements from an unbeliever:

- There’s no way for humans to know God, including learning more about Jesus.
- Jesus was only a man and, therefore, he is not an adequate substitute for God himself.
- People should be afraid of Jesus because he is the ultimate judge.
- Jesus’ words may reflect God’s will, but we can’t assume his words are sufficient for life and faith.

Based on the findings from the Bible-marking activity, have groups respond to each statement, referring to a specific verse from the lesson Scripture text. After 10 minutes have a representative from each group provide a response to one of the statements, until all the statements have been addressed. Finally, ask volunteers to share what they find especially helpful or challenging from the text.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Light and Dark” activity from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated.

Into Life

Divide the class into pairs to answer these questions which you will write on the board: 1–Why do you think some people acknowledge that Jesus was a good man, but do not acknowledge that he is God? 2–What commands of Jesus do you think are most difficult for believers to follow?

After several minutes, ask volunteers to share their responses to each question. After no more than 10 minutes, say, “Following the commands of Jesus is how we can live a life that

reflects God’s light for the world to see.”

Have students work in the same pairs to develop a plan of action for how they each might better follow the commands of Jesus. This plan should include how each student will recruit an accountability partner to encourage their obedience.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Light Meter” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated. After no more than five minutes, have volunteers give their answers to the third question on the handout.