

The last days of public ministry

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] John chapter 12, 4. I think half an hour would be great if we can do this for half an hour or so. So this bit at the end of chapter 12 is rather like what goes before.

It seems to be little bits, but they are connected. And I'd like us just to go through them and think about them.

I don't think I can claim to be doing anything more wonderful than that. But that's good enough, isn't it, to go through what the Bible says and think about it together. Every now and again John's Gospel has the habit of turning something up that you find so radical.

It's almost off-putting. And this is one of those places. In some places he's very predestinarian. And I think this is one of those places.

But he does put it in a very powerful balance with other statements and thoughts. So let's go through this together.

[1:47] We might do it in the way that there are answers and discussion.

If it's a yes or no answer, don't bother waiting for the microphone. But if it's a sentence or more than a sentence, it would be really helpful to have the microphone so, A, everybody can hear, and B, it gets recorded so people who aren't here can catch up and it makes sense to them.

So we're looking in John 12, 37 to 50. And it's a sort of summary of the ministry of Jesus. It's sort of trying to encapsulate it and make some main points about it.

And particularly, it talks about the response to the ministry of Jesus. Would you just like to look through it and cast your eyes over it?

What response is the one that's most mentioned or most to the forefront?

[2:58] Unbelief. Yes, unbelief is a good way of putting it because it says in verse 37, after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

So, unbelief. It doesn't say that everybody disbelieved, but it does say that many people didn't believe.

Which actually, John tells us right at the beginning, where he says in chapter 1, verse 11, He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. And then in the next sentence, he says, but some did receive.

Chapter 1, verse 12, Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.

So, John's Gospel is realistic about the fact that there is unbelief. So, let's put that unbelief, let's see all the things that are said about it.

[4:16] Verse 42, no, why don't I put 42? I think I meant 37. Excuse me. There was no lack of what, according to verse 37?

signs. Signs. Yes. Sorry, did somebody say something else? Yeah, it does say miraculous signs, although that's a bit of an over-translation, because it does just, it just says, say signs.

So, I'll stick with signs. No lack of signs. And I think I could, I think we could expand that to say there was no lack of evidence. Do you think that would be fair to say that?

Just to, what do the signs do? They provide reasons for believing in Jesus. So, let's notice that first. There isn't a lack of evidence.

If people don't believe, or these people in particular don't believe, it isn't because there wasn't enough evidence. Jesus did a lot of signs.

[5:37] And of course, John's Gospel picks out approximately seven of them for our attention. Okay, let's go on to verses 38 to 40, or 41.

This is to do with Isaiah the prophet. Let's take a look at what it says. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet. Quotation, as Isaiah says elsewhere, quotation, verse 41, Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

So, what does Isaiah have to say about this strange reality of unbelief despite a large amount of evidence?

Which verse are you on there? Okay. So, yeah, so there is such a thing as blindness and there is such a thing as something in the heart.

It says here deadening. It's sometimes quoted elsewhere as hardening. So, there is a deadness and a hardening of the heart.

[7:03] Does it say harden? Does it? It's hard. Does it? Okay. Do you know of anywhere else where this is quoted? No.

The hardening of the heart is a pharaoh thing. Yes. So, he's sort of the original hard heart person. Is that a guess or are you doing that from memory? I can't spell pharaoh. I will say that I was put off from spelling pharaoh because I was talking to you at the same time. I think, so, Ezekiel talks about a hard heart being taken away and replaced by a soft heart.

Yes. Yes. Okay. So, that's helpful. So, I'm sorry? Callous? Yeah. Callous.

Yes, the hearts are calloused. There's a sort of hardness, isn't it? So, there's a, I think the, one of the words uses sclerosis. So, what's arteriosclerosis?

[8:17] Hardening of the arteries. Yes. There's a sort of heart sclerosis. So, Ezekiel talks about taking away the hard heart. Thank you. Which chapter is that?

Chapter 36. Chapter 36. Thank you. Your spirit will be your heart and will be your heart and flesh.

Fantastic. Yes. So, that's a promise looking forward from the time of Ezekiel looking forward.

Thank you very much. Excellent. Going back to the quote, 40, verse 40. Is there not anywhere else that that gets quoted?

So, we've thought of the hardness of heart in terms of Pharaoh, which we can perhaps come back to? Yeah. Parable of the sower.

Yeah. Let's see if we can find a parable of the sower somewhere. Or, parables in general, isn't it?

[9:20] Yes. So, I went back to Mark chapter 4. Is that about right? Yes. Same theme.

The translation looks a little bit different, doesn't it? I haven't done the homework on that. But, it's certainly there in Mark chapter 4. To those on the outside, everything is said in parables so they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding, otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.

So, that quote and that thought is not a blip in the New Testament. It occurs elsewhere and it occurs in connection not least with the parables of Jesus.

So, for John to say this here is not it's not just a totally out of order thing. Can we just doing the John version of it.

What link does John make with the ancient prophecy and the response of the people in Jesus' own day?

[10:44] Roberto. Roberto. Roberto. to fulfill yes thank you yeah there's a full not the reason not the consequence let me if I put the word fulfill that's what it says isn't it this was to fulfill the word of Isaiah so if I've understood what you're saying it's like saying if we go to Old Testament to New Testament there are some things that happen in the Old Testament that go forward and those were supposed to those lines were supposed to meet in Jesus so things that were happening here happen in the ministry of Jesus par excellence yeah there's a continuity continuity and a fulfillment so a filling of meaning in Jesus yeah okay so so in other words what we're saying is this unbelief among other things is a fulfillment of something that

God had that had been happening that God had been speaking about in his word in the Old Testament thank you anybody want to take that any further connection between the unbelief and

what Isaiah says!

people were hardening their hearts were hardening their hearts then I mean why you know why have their eyes got to be blinded is it because you know it just you know to look at it on the surface it seems jolly unfair doesn't it?

if you look at it on the surface it seems unfair yes but is it because earlier on they were they were just ignoring Jesus' miracles that that well this is a good question isn't it?

it's a very good question I mean if we go back to the hard heart of Pharaoh and without I don't think we've got time to look at all the things in Exodus but you remember that Pharaoh you remember the the sort of negotiation that took place let my people go they're going to go for a what was it?

[13:54] three days journey into the desert and then come back which seems very reasonable request to me and he says no and then there is a a stronger request and he says no and then he gets used to saying no and so when the next request comes he's better at saying no so with in Pharaoh's case from one side of it there is Pharaoh who is choosing to say no and choosing to say no more and more strongly so in in scripture it says Pharaoh hardened his heart but it isn't as though the Bible won't let us say okay well God just stood back let that all happen and said oh look he's got a hard heart now it's always seen as part of God's sovereign mysterious plan so the Bible will also say God hardened Pharaoh's heart so I don't know how to put those two together but it would not be fair on the Bible to take one of them away yes so in in Mark's gospel which we're not doing but in Mark's gospel as we as it goes through from the parables

Jesus says to his disciples are your hearts hard are you so calloused so he he he sort of interacts with his disciples on this whole point don't harden your hearts what does it say in Psalm 95 if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as they did in the in the wilderness whatever it was so there's a there is a dynamic here between our human responsibility and God's mysterious so the the word that theologians use is sovereignty which means

God's ability to be king that's what sovereign means and to make sure his will happens in all sorts of mysterious ways but he he makes sure it happens so let's see if I expel sovereignty does that look right to you sovereignty so there's an interplay between human responsibility and God's mysterious sovereignty but would you like to look please at how this Isaiah quote is phrased which of them is the bottom line in the way that John portrays it with Isaiah which is which is the bottom line or perhaps you might think that's not a valid question perhaps it doesn't have a yes or no answer but well that's an interesting point yes have the microphone yeah I'm only just making that point I mean I think it's inexplicable really yes I don't think we can answer it and as you said earlier both things seem to be prominent in scripture but it does say that God has blinded their eyes I mean they can't make themselves unblind yeah only God can do that so it brings us back to the fact that we're totally reliant on God to take the action thank you that's really really helpful I'd never thought of that we can harden our hearts but we can't soften our hearts that's really helpful and it also puts us in the position of being desperately seriously dependent on God I think that we really need to grasp that point verse 39 says for this reason they could not believe that seems a very negative statement they could not believe it's a statement of incapacity of inability they could not believe and it's a very negative about human nature so it would be really nice if this passage was saying well you know people have got some good and some bad there's a bit of yin a bit of yang and if you just leave them alone they'll believe at least some of them will but actually this is much more negative and it says they could not believe it's a statement of inability and

I would say that other parts of the Bible say it isn't just the Jews who couldn't believe it's human beings as sinners who can't believe and unless God softens our hearts unless he opens our eyes we can't see and we can't believe which makes it a really critical thing for somebody coming to faith to understand that coming to faith becoming a Christian is not simply within human capacity like joining the AA or deciding you'll get EON as your energy provider as distinct from first utility or something like that which should I choose on this it's something that I must do I must believe in Jesus Christ but I cannot do it only God can give me that I need to cry to him to pray to him

[20:24] Lord you must make me a Christian Lord I can't see unless you open my eyes Lord my heart is so hard unless you give me a soft heart I will never become a Christian unless you make me a Christian and it's

that desperation really of pressure between I must be a Christian I can't be a Christian only God can make me a Christian that's that's the way I see it and I okay so let's just be putting this together because it it says there was no lack of signs so Jesus was not of the view that because he was he was speaking to hard hearted people he should just not bother is that right he was not of the view that he should not bother he very earnestly cries out to these people come to me believe in me walk in the light put your trust in the light he very strongly makes this appeal and he does the signs so we've got to put all these components together there is no lack of signs there is a human responsibility and there is

God's mysterious sovereignty let's go on a little bit shall we verse 42 so here's a little case study of how this works out in practice at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him but because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue for they loved the praise from men rather than praise from God now then do you think verse 42 these people are Christians verse 42 the people among the leaders who believed they would like to be Christians but they haven't really turned their hearts round because they prefer the praise of men rather than the praise of

God thank you anybody want to agree or disagree right we've got our summer over here you've got a microphone to disagree into I'm not actually disagreeing I'm not actually disagreeing I'm just saying that you can be a Christian and still like the praise of man yes I'm not saying that's me I think that's most of us actually there's always a battle isn't it for which do we think is most important the approval of the people around us or the approval of God so I think there's a difference between what Christians have as a tussle although they know what the answer is in principle can we let Steve go

I was going to say I mean in fact we know that some of them did eventually become believers I mean Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are obvious examples so presumably they were converted but they hadn't fully realised the implications of it or what it required them to do ok thank you very much Christopher was going to say ok you're going to get a microphone Romans 10 Romans 10 verse 9 says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved there's something very important about confession testimony and that's exactly the point that is being referred to back in John 12 42 they would not confess their faith the fear that they would put out of the synagogue so we don't know what's in the heart but these seem to be important evidences of the truth or otherwise of being Christian whether we have a confessing spirit yes I think we could say that however they ended up and they might have been of the people that Steve mentioned who ended up confessing Christ but at this point it's not satisfactory it's not satisfactory to be convinced in your heart that Jesus was right but not to commit to it in such a way that you would be prepared to stand up and say it!

[25:31] that's not where a Christian ought to be at if you look back in chapter 5 John chapter 5 verse 44 he gives this exact same thought of people who refused to accept the testimony of Jesus and he says how can you believe if you accept praise from one another yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God so it's exactly the same thought here and it seems to me that what we've got is this tussle this struggle so there's somebody who's pulled in one direction by the glory of people men and pulled in this way by glory of

God because when it says praise it's more it's actually the word glory and so here you see responsibility sort of works out in a particular case so somebody's received the evidence they say that evidence there's no fault with that evidence but I'm not prepared to commit on it because it matters more to me what my colleagues think than what God thinks and you would say well there's not a deep mystery there come on get your act together if if Jesus is who he says he is and you're convinced he is then you need to walk that walk you need to put one foot in front of the other on the basis that Jesus is the son of God and if your colleagues disapprove of you then so be it I mean isn't that what what we ought to be saying to that person isn't that the logic of it correct yeah well maybe like that yes yes there's a sort of dividedness yeah didn't

Jesus say something along the lines of whoever denies me before men I will deny before my father in heaven so yes that adds weight to the fact that confessing Christ is not an optional part of being a

Christian it's integral to being a Christian Christ says you are my disciples if you do what I say so it's kind of elaborating what true belief is because the devil believes in God and Jesus but he doesn't follow him so it's an element of acting and doing I agree with you I agree with that I think the if I may say so I don't think the distinction in the Bible is between heart knowledge and head knowledge it's between knowing that leads to action and just knowing that you don't do anything about so I think action is the crucial thing why do you call me lord lord but not do what I say so here they know it but they're not prepared to act on it that would be my view on that let's move on in verse so we we've got unbelief we've got evidence we can see this working out in the struggle of particular people and this does not stop Jesus making promises and making a free offer he says Jesus cries out verse 44 when a man believes in me he does not believe in me only but the one who sent me when he looks at me he sees the one who sent me I have come into the world as a light that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness so I would say this is in the area of a promise a statement so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness

I think we'd say that was a promise if you believe in me you will not stay in darkness would anybody like to comment on the statements that he's making there in verse 44 to 46 because I'm not sure if I can think of a good word to sum it up but maybe somebody can think of a good word what do those verses contribute to our understanding of Jesus and the gospel yeah thank you Chris I think that is the case it's the identification of the son and the father so Jesus is saying when you when you believe in me you are believing in the one who sent me we're that close so you haven't got to believe in

[31:33] Jesus get that sorted and then believe in God as a separate thing if you're believing in Jesus you're believing in God and if you're seeing Jesus you're seeing God the father and does it say is there another one believe me looks at me no that's right so yeah it's the identity of the son and the father that's one of John John's really big themes who is Jesus he is the exact representation of God everything about Jesus exactly shows who God is which is just such a remarkable claim isn't it he's the son of the father is really what's what's being said there Jesus uses the terms I am which almost kind of very subtly points to deity and he says something along the lines of before Abraham was I am which the

Jews would have found absolutely horrendous yes they picked up stones to stone him I think at that point yes he uses the I am way of doing it but he also does the sorry!

He forgives sins yes he forgives sins and he also sets up this relationship between himself and his father such that there is nothing that the father has that the son does not have and there's nothing that the son has that the father does not have so you get this exact matching between the father and the son so it's a little bit like if you have a loud speaker system and you know that there are some notes in the original that the loud speaker never comes out with so it's not a very good copy and then again the loud speaker generates some notes some squeals and buzzes that were never in the original but Jesus says I'm not like either of those I am an exact representation of the father it's like having a loud speaker system that is indistinguishable from the original you know it's come through something but it's so faithful and precise it's just the original see what I mean it's like that let's look at verses 47 because

I'm conscious time is moving on here's something else about Jesus word this is more in terms of a warning as for the person who hears my words but does not keep them I do not judge him for I did not come to judge the world but to save it there is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words the very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day for I did not speak of my own accord but what the father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it I know that his command leads to eternal life so whatever I say is just what the

has told me to say so that sort of transcription thing again here isn't it that if I drew a circle to show the father and then he passes on to the son everything to say and that is what the son speaks into the world and those lines go straight through there's nothing that Jesus says that hasn't come from the father and there's nothing the father says that Jesus fails to communicate to us is that fair I did not speak on my own accord but what the father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it whatever I say is just what the father has told me to say and this has an implication a warning anybody like to tell us what the warning is this is true if you reject

[36:01] Jesus you reject God we probably take that a little bit further from these verses yeah judgment on the last day the words themselves will be the judge in the sense I think he's saying that on the last day the thing will be why did you not believe you had the words end of story you had those words and you didn't believe that that's a condemnation in itself would that be about right Roberto yeah Jesus came for to save the world yes thank you and verse 49 he obeys

God there is obedience verse 49 say that again because he does what God commands him yes the implication is obedience on the part of Jesus Jesus obeyed God yes he received a command and just pass it on yeah exactly that the implication is salvation and obedience they are linked in Jesus okay I don't know whether I would quite make those connections I'm I'm just thinking about what you said but certainly Jesus obeys it's like it's like ballroom dancing where two dancers dance as one now I'm hopeless at ballroom dancing so don't don't take any what I'm told is that one the man leads and the woman follows but they dance as one it's just indistinguishable it just flows like that so you raised eyebrow this is what I'm told thank you

Asama the father commands the son and the son is totally willing to do exactly what the father says in the way the father says it this is true of his words it's also true of his actions and they are as one in if you see the son you see the father yes he said it to Philip have you which I always remember this have you been with me so long and you don't realize that if you've seen me you've seen the father we will stop because we've we've used our time let's pray