

John 12:37-50

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, Christ Church. It is an honor to be worshiping with you this morning from my bedroom, which I try to clean up as best I could. My name is Jeremy White. I'm the co-youth director here at Christ Church Chicago.

And our scripture reading today is going to be taken from John 12, verses 37 to 50. So go ahead and grab your Bibles or open your phones. And our scripture reading will be John 12, verses 37 to 50.

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him. But for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

And Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I've come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

[1 : 3 3] If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me does not receive my words, has a judge.

And the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. Thanks, Jeremy.

I appreciate that reading. And welcome. Welcome to the new building. I'm standing in the balcony. And there is just a wonderful project ahead of us.

And I am really excited about seeing many of you here next Sunday. So just as last Sunday, we were able to sign a founding document. So this coming Sunday, you get an opportunity to come here.

[2 : 3 9] Last week, we had a couple hundred people. We expect the same next week to present your commitment card to this glorious project. And then I'm also going to be here in a COVID-ready way to serve communion to you.

We have been seven weeks without it. And we have intentionally not done it until we could gather in person. And next week will allow us individually to do that.

So I look forward to you being here next week. Let me just open us in a word of prayer. Our Heavenly Father, I now pray that as we look at this complex text, you would make it clear, simple, and that you would help us to understand it and live as John would have us because of it.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, when it comes to late night talk show hosts, this generation has a plethora of options.

You've got Jimmy Fallon. You've got Jimmy Kimmel. You've got Steve Colbert. You've got Conan O'Brien when and when he doesn't have a contract. And you've got a number of others.

[3 : 51] My generation had two options to choose from. And I'll let you see those names in a moment. But my parents' generation and the generation before them, when it turned to late night TV, they had one option.

It was either Johnny Carson or prior to that, Ed Sullivan. The day I grew up in, you could see Jay Leno or David Letterman. I just want to say a word on the singular genius of David Letterman as I open this sermon today.

Letterman had the unique ability to speak to three audiences all at the same time. There was the person that he was interviewing.

There were the people who were in the studio and could hear that interview. And then there were the rest of us at home who could see that interview transpire on TV.

Three audiences. And the reason I mention this is because we have a text today that that truth is important to remember. As a preacher, I am often challenged and considering Letterman's role with audience.

[5 : 16] Let me put it to you this way. There are people in the text itself that the preacher has to consider. There are the people to whom the text was written or who could, in one sense, hear it for the first time.

And then there are those like us who come with some distance, but who now can see it. The people in the text. The people to whom the text was written.

And the people to whom I preach. Why all this with this text? Well, take a look. When you look at the people in the text, they are there in verses 37 through 43.

Six verses. And they're called them. If you look at that, when Jesus had done many signs, verse 37, before them.

Those are the people in the text. But when you get to verse 44 through 50, the second set of six verses that we'll look at, you move beyond simply the them in the text to a wider audience of those who could hear it or overhear it, and even way all the way to us who now see me preaching from it.

[6 : 46] The them of 37 becomes the whoever of 44. The whoever of 45.

The anyone in the same movement. What does John want us to know in that first movement today?

What does he want you to know about the people in the text? What would he have us know about them? Two things, really. Take a look at verse 37 first.

Though he had done many signs before them. Here it is. They still did not believe in him. And then even more provocatively in verse 39.

Therefore, they could not believe in him. This is what John wants you to know about those who are in the text. They did not believe in him.

[7 : 48] They could not believe in him. Well, before we really even think about why it was that they couldn't believe, it would be helpful to know who we are actually referring to.

Who are the them in this most perplexing text? Clearly, it's not all of them.

Did you see in the reading at verse 42 and 43? Nevertheless, many, even of the authorities, did believe in him.

But their belief was personal or probably even better put, it was private. They were believers, but they weren't willing to walk it out in public.

And the reason is, it says they were afraid that the Pharisees would put them out of the synagogue. And these are men and women who yet had not seen that to follow Jesus is to come out from among those who would ridicule them.

[8 : 57] So who are they? Well, the them who did not believe, who had seen the signs, the them who could not believe, are certainly not all people.

Many of them, authorities, did believe. What else can we say about them? Clearly, it's not the disciples. Because when the first sign was given in John 2, verse 11, when Jesus turned the water into wine, it says that it was the first time Jesus had manifested his glory.

And it indicates that the disciples believed in him. It also wasn't the recipient of those seven signs that we have seen thus far in John's gospel.

Certainly, Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, believed. The man at the pool confessed. The blind man in chapter 9 actually began to indicate who it was.

So who are they? Who are the them who did not believe? Who are they who could not believe? It is a subset of individuals who saw the signs and yet resisted.

[10 : 18] Largely religious, pharisaical leaders. You've only got to look back at the signs in John to understand that when Jesus healed the man at the pool, the sign, was questioned.

And who was this that would do something like this on the very Sabbath? Or you think of the great sign of the feeding of the 5,000 later in John chapter 6.

There were many who rejected that he would be the bread of life given unto them. In fact, it says that many turned away from him on that day.

I think supremely who John the writer is thinking of here on those who did not believe and could not believe have their roots back with the other sign in John chapter 9 when the blind man was healed from his blindness.

It might be worth just flipping your Bible over to John 9 and to realize again that when Jesus performed this sign, verse 18, the Jews did not believe that he had been blind or that he had received his sight.

[11 : 35] You can see later in verse 34 of John 9, After questioning the blind man, they answered him, You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?

And they cast him out. Literally, they withdrew his membership from the synagogue and alienated him from the people of God.

In fact, these religious leaders who did not believe the sign, who could not believe the sign, who were already dispensing judgment on any who would dare to believe the sign, look what Jesus says of them in John 9, particularly in verse 40.

Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things. What things? Well, namely, that he had come that those who do not see may see and that those who do see may be blind.

And they asked him, Are we also blind? And verse 41, Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say we see, your sin remains.

[12 : 42] Who are they? They are a subset of Jewish religious leaders who did not believe the signs.

Why? Why didn't everyone accept the word of Christ? Why didn't they receive him, even in the midst of those many signs?

Well, you can see in the text, back to that first movement, there are two reasons. One, it was predicted that they would not believe.

Do you see verse 34? I'm sorry, 38? So the word spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled. And then he launches into that servant song from Isaiah 53.

In other words, Isaiah indicating that there was a rejection, a lack of belief, even though God had made himself manifest.

[13 : 47] So they did not believe because the prophet had already predicted that they would not believe. In fact, it's even stronger.

Look at what he does in verse 39. It's not merely that Isaiah predicted their unbelief. It's that Isaiah promised it.

And he promised it through the judgment of God's own word. Verse 39. Therefore, they could not believe.

For again, Isaiah said, and here he draws from Isaiah 6. He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

Verse 41 stunningly indicates that Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him, namely Jesus.

[14 : 47] That Isaiah, when he wrote, predicted a future rejection of the Messiah when he came.

Indeed, he promised a rejection because God himself would not redeem all of Israel, but some from among her.

How are we to make sense of this? What purpose does this disbelief serve in the plan of God?

It's a mysterious truth from the text. I was thinking today, this week, that the Apostle Paul might be of some help to us.

Paul uses the same quotation from Isaiah 6 that we find in verse 40 in the closing salvo of the book of Acts.

[15 : 59] And while I don't normally have you look to two different texts on any given week in the midst of the sermon, it would be helpful for us all to thumb our way forward to Acts 28 and to see Paul's reference of this same verse.

There it is.

Local Jewish religious leaders. It's in the context where verse 23, they had appointed a day for Paul to come to them and to speak.

And it says, From morning till evening, he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the prophets.

And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement.

[17 : 28] He indicated the Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet, Indeed, some of you with eyes who can see will not see. Some of you with ears who should be able to hear will not hear.

Verse 29 or 28. Let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen. And he lived there two years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Why does not all ethnic Israel receive Jesus as their anointed king?

Well, because the prophet Isaiah predicted it. The prophet Isaiah promised it. The plan of God was to redeem as many as who would believe.

Indeed, he would enlarge his own family by having others who had not been born under the promise receive it, even the Gentiles like you and me.

[18 : 49] Now, if you're like me, at that moment in the text, your mind is probably beginning to race with a series of questions that you would like to talk to God about.

This mysterious, ordaining plan that not all people would under his own hand be led and moved and drawn to believe.

And we would love to look after verse 43 and see our voices rise and our questions be asked concerning what God has done with them, the people in the text.

But notice what happens. It moves from those people who are in the text to a loud cry by Jesus.

Verse 44. And Jesus cried out and said, notice, whoever believes, again, verse 45, whoever sees, again, verse 46, so that whoever believes, in other words, our voices are hushed and we are brought again to the seat of the listener.

[20 : 23] And what God has done with them in the text, others who were in it and who could overhear it are now invited to a very different outcome.

And those who first read it could have a different outcome. And you who hear me preach from it can yet have a different outcome.

Let's take a look just for a few minutes at this second movement of the text, these six verses that go not from what does John want us to know about them in the text, but what would John have to say to us?

And to you who read the text and who hear my word this morning from the text. Two things.

Two things, John would have you know in these verses. First, that if you would simply number yourself among the whoever, among the ones who would believe, among the ones who would have spiritual sight or see, among the ones who would believe that you might not remain in darkness, the text indicates, first, that you will be uniting yourself, yourself, not only to the son, but to the father who sent him.

[22 : 05] Do you see that in the text? Verse 44, whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. Whoever sees me with spiritual eyes sees him who sent me.

In other words, in 44 through 46, if you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, who has victory over death and the ability to forgive sins and the power to transform your life, then you will not only have him, but you are reunited with the one who sent him.

God, the father. I mean, for us, this truth is really good news. You get God as your father by laying hold of Jesus as your elder redeeming brother.

John opened on this very idea that the word was in the beginning with God. The word was God and that he was sent unto his own who did not receive him.

But, verse 12 of chapter 1, as many who would receive him, God gave them the right to become children of God.

[23 : 37] Today, we celebrate family. We celebrate the one who gave us birth. and we have a text in which we are able to be brought back into God's family.

Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what you desire? Aren't you tired of the fractured spiritual existence of being out of sorts with God?

wouldn't this be a wonderful day, a good day, when we celebrate the one who gave us birth to actually embrace Christ and be given ourselves up as children of God and having God as our Father?

You can become a child of God today. not by your ethnicity, not by your family background, not by your lineage, not by your privileges, no, none of it.

Simply by embracing Jesus as the Savior of sinners, and you will have him, and you will have his Father.

[24 : 54] But there's more. And this is equally intriguing to me. Notice what it says in verses 47 and 48.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, or again, verse 48, the one who rejects me and does not receive my word, well, to that one, they will be given over to judgment.

On the last day, to the one who receives, to whoever believes, you become a child of God. But anyone who will not keep, who will not receive, who will not reject, it isn't Jesus that will have to stand on judgment day to pronounce judgment upon you, it will be his very word.

Let me put it to you this way. What does John want us to know from this text? First, that you can be uniting yourself to the Father by receiving his Son.

And second, you will uncouple yourself from the Father on a day of judgment by not receiving the word of his Son.

[26 : 28] And what is that word? Verse 50, And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say, as the Father has told me.

Why did John write these words that we've looked at today? He wanted us to know something about them.

There were many who disbelieved. It was predicted. It was promised. It had already been prophesied. But even in the midst of that rejection of his own people, many still did.

What does he want to know from you? He wants you to be reunited to the Father by belief in the Son. He does not want you to be uncoupled from him on the day of judgment, because then you would forfeit, verse 50, eternal life.

I can't put it any more simply than the way John will later put it in his own gospel. Namely, that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in these books, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, that is that anointed one of the Hebrew scriptures, and that by embracing that truth as the Son of God, that by believing you may have life in his name.

[28 : 07] I offer you today eternal life through faith in Christ. John's desire for you in reading this is that you would come to believe and have eternal life.

To put it clearly, be numbered among the whosoever rather than the they who rejected.

May this text be meaningful for you rather than merely a dry academic exercise that you work out regarding what it meant for some of them.

To put it in the most famous verse of the Bible, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

My prayer for you today is that you'd have life, real life. Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we consider this word, we are humbled, humbled by the opportunity to respond, to respond, humbled by your gracious love, humbled by the knowledge that while salvation is shut out to some, by some, even in the midst of that, nevertheless, some will believe.

[29 : 59] O, may everyone under the sound of my voice make their own salvation the supreme issue of their mind and their heart and their will, that we might all know what it is to be united to the Father in a way that we will not be uncoupled from him on the judgment day.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, we're going to go.