

So Many Signs and Yet...

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[0 : 0 0] Well, sometimes as we're reading our Bibles, we come to passages that are difficult. And as I've said before, there's different reasons for why they're difficult. The Bible was originally written in different languages, and so sometimes translation makes it difficult, bringing that over into English.

Other times the translation is good, but it's what's spoken about that's difficult to understand. God tells us about spiritual realities, being born again by the Spirit, how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

And sometimes those things are difficult for us to get our heads around. But sometimes it's not an issue of translation or understanding what the passage says.

It's that the passage itself and what it says is difficult to accept. Maybe it offends us. Or it says something that we don't really like or don't want to hear.

Well, we are the Davidson Community Bible Church, and we do believe that God has spoken through these pages, every word.

[1 : 1 6] And He doesn't make mistakes. So when we get to those passages, we come with a little bit of fear and trembling, but we've got to take our time to stop and to listen and consider what the Lord has said to us.

So that's one of those passages that we've got before us today. We're in the story of Jesus as told by John. We're still in John chapter 12. If you have a Bible with you, I won't have anything on the screen this morning.

I didn't get time to do that, but ask if you just follow along in your Bible. There's also the pew Bibles in front of you, the black books in the seats there. And here's where we're at in the story.

Jesus has just come into Jerusalem. Triumphant entry. Most of you know the story. And it's the final week leading up to his death. And he's had a conversation with some of the people, the Jews, there in the city, which we've been following along in chapter 12.

And last week we heard about how he was pleading with them to believe in the light while they have the light, while they have the opportunity, before that window of opportunity closes.

[2 : 2 6] And this is the end of that conversation. John tells us how it ended in verse 36 of John chapter 12.

When Jesus had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. So we don't really know where Jesus went, but if we look at the other Gospels, we can kind of piece things together.

During this week leading up to his death, Jesus would come into the city of Jerusalem during the day. And he would teach the people. He would speak to the people. And then oftentimes in the evening, he would make his way out of the city.

And there's a couple different places he would hang out with, oftentimes his disciples. The Mount of Olives, some of the gardens and groves around there. And then eventually probably make his way out to Bethany, where maybe he stayed.

We don't know for sure if he slept at the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. But that was kind of his pattern. So Jesus has been in the spotlight.

[3 : 32] He's come into the city. There's been this discussion with the crowds. And now he goes off the radar, but not for long, just probably for the evening.

And we'll see him again soon. But John now takes a moment to kind of step back and address us, the people who are reading his account, and give us some help to understand what's going on here.

I mean, we just heard Jesus talking to this crowd. And in the midst of this, or right leading into this conversation, God spoke in an audible voice to Jesus.

And we might be wondering, how is it that the people could hear that and walk away from that and still not believe?

Well, John is now going to tell us a little bit and try to give us some help to understand what's really going on here between Jesus and the people. Verse 37.

[4 : 30] John writes this, Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not or did not believe in him.

Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This is quite the statement.

And in the original language, which is a little bit more flexible with word order, they would often emphasize things by just moving it right up to the front of the sentence. And what's emphasized here is so many.

Even after Jesus had performed so many signs, John says, in their presence. Let's think about that for a moment.

In their presence. Literally, in front of them, before them. In the sight of them. Now, this doesn't mean, of course, that each person there was hovering right over top of Jesus as he performed each miracle.

[5 : 39] But it does mean that these things were close enough to them, that they were done openly enough, that virtually everybody in Jerusalem probably knows somebody who has been affected by the miracles that Jesus did, by the signs that he performed, by the healings.

John's already told us about three people in his gospel in Jerusalem or the vicinity. We heard about the man at the Pool of Bethesda who couldn't walk for 38 years.

Jesus healed him. We heard about the man who had been born blind in John chapter 9. Jesus gave him sight. And then we heard, just recently, about Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, just outside the city.

Many of the people in Jerusalem had been to his funeral. And there were also a crowd of them who were out there that witnessed his resurrection from the dead. So that's just three.

But John says, not just three, but so many signs in their presence. It reminds me of what we read way back near the beginning.

[6 : 54] John chapter 2, verse 32. Sorry. John chapter 2, verse 23.

This was three years ago. At the Passover in Jerusalem, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, it says this, Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

So the people of Jerusalem are no strangers to what Jesus has been doing. It's not as though they just heard about the signs. Oh yeah, way over in Galilee he did that.

No, right here in Jerusalem, Jesus had been performing signs. Nicodemus was one of the religious leaders who saw them. We know that you are a man who has come from God because who could perform do the things you're doing if God were not with him, he said.

In fact, when we bring all the gospel accounts together, we see that Jesus has been doing so many signs, so many miracles, so many healings, it's just, you couldn't even begin to number them.

[8 : 08] I mean, consider this, when people started to go out to him, he would heal them, word was spreading, this was back in the early days of Jesus, more people would hear about that and if they had some kind of malady, they were going out, people were flocking out to Jesus from all over the nation.

It says in Matthew 4, verse 23, he was healing all their diseases, all their sicknesses, all their sicknesses, with the exception of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, where it says he only did a few miracles, and with the couple times where the Pharisees came right up to his face and said, show us a sign and then we'll believe.

And of course, Jesus wouldn't do it then. With the exception of those two things, Jesus has been doing miracles, healings, signs, left, right, and center.

In Galilee, in Jerusalem, wherever he goes, this is the picture that we get from the Gospels. John chapter 7, verse 31.

Even in Jerusalem, they acknowledge this. still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, when the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?

[9 : 33] In other words, like how many more do we need to see? Like, it's obvious, isn't it? How many would we expect the Messiah to do? He's done so many. Even the religious leaders could not deny that Jesus had done many signs.

They too witnessed some of them. John chapter 11, verse 47. At the meeting of the Sanhedrin, they asked, what are we accomplishing?

Here is this man performing many signs. Isn't that something? even Jesus' opponents admitted that he'd been not just, you know, a couple different recoveries, coincidentally, for different people.

Many signs, they said. We might wonder, well, why did John only tell us about a few that he's done in Jerusalem? Well, as we hear at the very end of the book of John, chapter 20, verse 30, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book.

And again, at the very end of the gospel, the last thing John tells us, Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

[11 : 00] And so, John is not exaggerating when he says so many signs were done in their presence. Miracles, healings, probably everybody there in Jerusalem knew of at least one person, if not, had, you know, a direct connection to some person who had been touched by the life of Jesus, by the healing of Jesus.

And yet, this is the sad statement that John gives us. They still would not believe in him.

Literally, it's did not. They still did not believe in him. What a sad statement. We might wonder, why?

How could this be? You might think of yourself in their shoes, like if I was seeing all these things, I'd believe.

We're a little biased because most of us already believe in Jesus. How could it be that they saw all those miracles of Jesus, healings, signs, and yet did not believe, would not listen to him?

[12 : 19] Well, John actually gives an answer here in verse 38 to 40. And this is where it gets difficult.

They still would not believe in him. Verse 38, this was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, Lord, who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? So John tells us that people did not believe Jesus in order that prophecy would be fulfilled.

Really, there's two ways to take that. How do those thoughts link together? There's two ways. In order that, or so that, the word that Isaiah spoke long ago would be fulfilled. Or some people, not the majority, but some people suggest that it's, they did not believe with the result that the word of Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled.

I think we kind of gravitate towards that, that one a little more. It seems to get God off the hook a little bit. The other, in order that the word of the prophets be fulfilled, almost seems to implicate God a little bit.

[13 : 39] It almost seems to suggest that maybe he was working or doing something that he had a purpose for them not believing in all of this. And so we might, we might wonder, well, what's going on?

What do you mean here, John? Which one is it? If we keep following what John says, though, it probably becomes pretty clear.

I'm going to read it again, starting from the top. Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, Lord, who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For this reason, says John, they could not believe because, as Isaiah says elsewhere, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts nor turn.

And I would heal them. This is where the passage gets difficult. Verse 39, especially, for this reason, says John, they could not believe.

[15 : 00] They could not believe. You can look it up in all of the major English translations. It says the same thing.

they could not believe. Christian standard Bible, relatively new translation, it actually says what could not means.

It says they were unable to believe. believe. And then the reason. Because, as Isaiah says, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

signs. Maybe even now the questions are starting to rise in your own mind. Well, but what about, how, what, how could, before we get to the questions, are you hearing what John is saying?

for this reason, they could not believe. That's the people that saw his signs. Because, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

[16 : 18] Maybe the first question on your mind is, well, would God do that? would he send Jesus with a message, and that message is, believe in me, and at the same time, harden the hearts of the people that Jesus was sent to?

Blind the eyes of the people that he was sent to? I mean, what's going on here? I don't know how else to read this, but it seems that that's what's going on here.

I mean, look back up to verse 36. Jesus is there pleading with the people. He's saying, believe in the light while you have the light. And then just write down the page.

For this reason, they could not believe. Could not believe. Because he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. Is it possible that there's more going on here between Jesus and the people than meets the eye?

I think so. I think so. The question is not, would God do it? The question is, why?

[17 : 46] We might do well to remember that there's another time that God has done something like this. We've been learning about it with the kids and alive. God sent Moses to Pharaoh.

Even before he went, I will harden Pharaoh's heart. And he will not say yes. But still give the message.

Give the command. And he did. And Pharaoh did exactly what God said he would. He hardened his heart. He refused to obey. And as the plagues kept coming, at some point you would think, man, Pharaoh's got to get it here.

But then it starts telling us in those latter plagues, it was God who was hardening the heart of Pharaoh, making his heart stubborn so that he would not respond.

And yet he still sent Moses each time and said, give him the command, let my people go. That's strange, isn't it?

[18 : 51] He's working on both sides of the equation. Is that what's going on here with Jesus and the people? I think so.

But why? Why would God do that? I think the key comes as we start looking into a little bit of Isaiah's prophecy.

That's who he quotes, the prophet Isaiah. So I encourage you to flip back. We're just going to look at it a little bit. I'll remind you of the story of Isaiah a little bit.

I'm not going to tell the whole thing. You probably know the story of Israel. As a nation, on the whole, they would continually turn away from God.

And though there was times of renewal and revival, where they turned to the Lord, then they would turn away again. And they just kept spiraling downward, further and further away from God.

[19 : 53] The Ten Commandments, which we're about to learn about and alive, the Israelites more and more were doing the very opposite of those things. Worshiping other gods.

There was corruption in the leadership. There was wickedness all over the place. God was sending the prophets to plead with the people, to repent, to turn away from their sin.

We're going to look actually at 2 Chronicles 36, verse 15. This just tells the end of the story of the era of the kings. This is still a ways after Isaiah prophesied, but this is how it went.

It's a good summary. 2 Chronicles 36, 15. Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers, that's the prophets, again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.

But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of Yahweh was aroused against his people, and there was no remedy.

[21 : 07] He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and who did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm.

God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 19, they set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem. They burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there, and the survivors, many of them, most of them, were carried off into exile.

Babylon. Isaiah came long before this, but do you hear what the word of the Lord is saying?

It's not as though God wasn't patiently pleading with the people all along. He was. He sent prophet after prophet after prophet after prophet, but God was saying to them, eventually there will come a time when enough is enough.

I will not tolerate wickedness and sin forever. That's what's going on with the story of Isaiah.

[22 : 21] Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18, probably at the beginning of Isaiah's ministry, Isaiah himself even pleads with the people to repent. God speaks through him.

In Isaiah 1 verse 18, he says, Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.

Even there through Isaiah, God was pleading with the people saying, Come, repent, humble yourself. Let's settle this. I will forgive you of all the wicked things you have done.

You can continue to remain in the land even. But if not, he gave the warning, there will come a time, when enough is enough.

[23 : 27] Punishment will come. He's a holy God. He will not tolerate sin or wickedness forever. And so when we come to Isaiah chapter 6, this is that moment when enough is enough.

Some of you may know the story. Isaiah has a vision of the Lord seated on a throne in glory. I won't go through the whole thing. But at some point here, the Lord speaks to Isaiah.

Or I guess he speaks just generally and asks the question in verse 8. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And I said, Isaiah, here am I.

Send me. Isaiah volunteers, verse 9, go and tell this people, be ever hearing, but never understanding.

Be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused. Make their ears dull and close their eyes.

[24 : 38] Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. It's a sobering word.

This is your assignment, Isaiah. This is your mission. The time has come when enough is enough. And this is my judgment. This is my punishment. Deaf ears, blind eyes, calloused hearts.

Isaiah says, for how long, Lord? And God answers in verse 11, until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. There's only a glimmer of hope that comes at the end. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.

So there came a time in Israel's story when eventually God said, enough is enough. There's no turning back. There's no opportunity from this point forward to repent and to change punishment.

[25 : 55] It's coming for your sin. And I think this is what John is talking about. He's saying here in John chapter 12, the reason the people here that are witnessing all these signs could not believe, were unable to believe, is because God is doing the same thing here and now today, in Jesus' day, with the Jewish people as he was doing back then.

it had come about that by God's own determination, for many of them, the verdict was enough is enough.

now I don't know how that worked for each individual person. Maybe it was on an individual basis. Maybe some of them, they'd been hearing the preaching of John the baptizer, and then they just made the choice to harden their hearts.

No, no, no, no. But eventually comes that moment where God hardens their hearts and closes the window of opportunity that they have to believe and to respond.

We talked about that a little bit last week. Jesus is pleading with them, believe in the light while you have the light. There is a window of opportunity for all of us. But it seems that that window of opportunity for some, for the Jewish people, was closed even in the midst of Jesus' ministry.

[27 : 33] Not for all of them. You'll remember how John began the gospel. He said that Jesus came to his own and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

So the general, on the whole, story of Israel was they rejected their Messiah, but not everyone. Not everyone did. One more passage that kind of confirms or brings this into focus well for us is in Romans chapter 11, verse 7.

In fact, all of Romans 9-11 really digs into this issue, the story of Israel. How is it that God is going to keep his promises and his covenants with Israel and yet they rejected the Messiah?

Many of them on the whole. That's the whole topic of this section, Romans 9-11. We won't look at it all, but just jump in in verse 7. Listen to this. Paul says, What then?

What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written.

[28 : 55] God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see, and ears that could not hear to this very day. Paul is reflecting back on why did all the children of Israel reject the Messiah?

He explains that there was a remnant, just like in the Old Testament days, that was chosen by grace and enabled to see, to believe, but that the others were hardened.

A punishment from God. He was saying enough is enough. The window of opportunity, at least in that generation for those people, was closed. You could think about the kinds of people that Jesus ran into during his ministry.

The Pharisees, the leaders of Israel, corrupt. They had hard hearts to Jesus. It wasn't that God just out of nowhere, decided, well, some of you guys are going to get mercy and others not.

No, they had had opportunity, and yet they had been resisting and refusing to listen all along the way.

[30 : 18] And so it seems that what John is saying here is that even as the signs kept increasing, Jesus kept doing more, it was obvious right in front of their faces. many of them could not believe because God had already said enough is enough with some in that generation and hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes.

These are sobering words. What's there here for us? I want to draw us back to what we talked about last Sunday.

There is a window of opportunity for each one of us to put our faith in Jesus, to respond to God's gracious offer of salvation, his plea to believe.

all of us have sinned, we have all done wrong, none of us deserves salvation. In fact, we all deserve the opposite.

And that window, it's really God who determines how long that will stay open for each one of us. And I think deep down inside we all know that, that window closes, we know for sure when we die, there's no opportunities after we die to believe, to receive salvation.

[31 : 54] But I think we're seeing here that God even has the sovereign right to close that window even sooner in our lives. It's a sobering thought.

So what do we do with this? Well, if you're here this morning and you have not put your faith in Jesus and received him as your Lord and Savior, I want to encourage you, today is the day to believe.

Not tomorrow, not someday. We don't know how long we have before God closes that door of opportunity for us. As God says elsewhere in his word, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Believe in the light while you have the light so that you may become children of light. Most of us here in this room have made that decision already.

God and I hope that you know that because of Jesus being in Christ, born of his spirit, you are safe.

[33 : 11] You are secure. This blinding of eyes and hardening of hearts will never come to you. Jesus paid the punishment and that covers you.

you are secure forever. But it doesn't mean that there is no place for fear, for reverence towards this holy God.

My mind kept going back to Philippians chapter two verse 11 and we will end with this. Sorry, two verse 12.

Paul writes this to the believers in Philippi. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

[34 : 21] even though we are safe and secure in Christ, let us not forget that we have a holy God and we ought not to go on doing the things that Christ died to atone for, those sins, those wicked things.

Paul says, continue to obey. God worked in the heart of Pharaoh and hardened it. It seems that he also worked in the hearts of some who were listening to Jesus and hardened them.

But, to those of us who are in Christ, it says that God works in us to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

we're not on our own in this. God is the one who enables us, gives us power to obey, to do what is good, to do what is right.

And so, that's what I take from these words. We have a holy God, a free God, a God who graciously gives us chances again and again and again, and yet a God who will not put up with sin and wickedness forever.

[35 : 43] And so, we should tremble before that. We should. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for these words.

I'll admit on behalf of everyone, not the words I wanted to hear at first, or the words I wanted to see as I began my prep, but it's the truth, it's your word.

I pray that you would help us to wrestle with these words well and to take you very seriously. Thank you that you are an amazing, gracious, merciful God.

We do not understand all of your ways, all of your dealings with people, with your special people, Israel, with us, the church, 2,000 years later, but we are so thankful that you have given so many of us in this room grace and that we have come to put our faith in you and to be saved.

And I pray, Lord, that we would continue to work to see others come to that as well. and we trust you with the results.

[37 : 02] You are the God who is capable of softening hearts. Soften the hearts of all in our midst who don't believe and all in this community who don't believe.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.