

He Saw His Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, it would be good if you could turn to John 12. We're on the fifth part of a six-part series on this one crucial chapter in the Gospel of John.
- It's the hinge between what was called the Book of Signs, chapters 1 through 11, and the Book of Glory, where we work towards the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- And in this very important chapter 12, we have been hearing who Jesus is and what he is about very clearly. And it's very interesting that as we come to this passage, we are seeing the unbelief, a widespread unbelief develop.
- And this is something that's very helpful for us to look at, because there is widespread unbelief around us all the time. Even as the media has discovered that there's some interest in spiritual things, in the past year we've had lots of talk about the Da Vinci Code, about the Gospel of Judas, and about the supposed tomb of Jesus, where his bones are to be found.
- And we see these expressions of unbelief happening around us. And certainly the public policy and media around us tends to trivialize Christian belief, to leave it in the realm of something that is an opinion, something that we shove off to the corner, and actually something that we should fear.
- [1 : 3 6] In our reading today, John actually teaches on unbelief, and it's a most relevant passage to us because of what I've described. It's also relevant to us because unbelief is something that becomes very, very personal to each of us who is sitting here today.
- I think probably all of us have people in our lives that do not believe in Jesus Christ. People who are very close to you, loved ones, friends, colleagues.
- Many of us know these people, and we pray for them. In fact, I think that probably the most diligent prayers in the world are parents that pray for their children to come to know God as their rescuer and as their Lord, to know the love of God in Jesus Christ.
- Those prayers are ongoing, often over years and years and years. And they are prayers of love because the mom or dad continues them out of a deep care for their children.
- And it's an incredible, joyous thing to hear of children who have come to faith in Jesus Christ because of the prayers of their parents over years and years.
- [2 : 5 4] And in fact, if you talk to people who have come to place their trust in Jesus, invariably there has been somebody in their family, or there has been a friend, or there has been somebody who just decided to pray for them.
- In each case, there are people who are diligently praying for them. And that makes sense because faith in Jesus is about a heart that is changed, a mind that is changed.
- And that's the miraculous work of God. And we know that the powerful work of God always works hand in hand with prayer. And so as we think of this subject of unbelief in our lives, it's very important for us to understand it, to not be afraid of unbelief, but to know that it is always subject to God's rule and authority.
- And that is what this passage that we look at today actually teaches us. And it does it in two ways. It first of all teaches us the nature of unbelief.

Look at verse 36. This is just before our passage that we read today. At the beginning of 36, Jesus says, While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.

[4 : 12] Now Jesus is describing himself, and he's describing this incredible gift of Jesus Christ in terms of light. And I think C.S. Lewis is very helpful for us at this point.

Because what he says about Christianity is he says, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Isn't that a marvelous quote?

And that's what Jesus is saying, that he is the light of the world. Through him we see everything. We see God's truth. God himself is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

This is an extraordinary thing that Jesus is saying about himself. A great gift. And yet, what do we see in verse 37?

Though he had done many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him. Here Jesus is offering himself, is offering the gift of being the light of the world, and it is met by a widespread unbelief.

[5 : 24] It's a key moment in the Gospel of John. Because here we see the massive rejection of his own people, of Jesus Christ. And it's what actually was told to us at the very beginning of the Gospel of John, in chapter 1, verse 11, Jesus came to his own, but his own received him not.

Now what Jesus does is he acts out a parable. In verse 36, in this little line, there's something quite serious that is said here. It says, When Jesus had said this, he departed, and he hid himself from them.

And there is a shocking thing that Jesus is doing here. He is revealing something about unbelief. In unbelief, God is hidden.

God is hidden from people. It's a shocking thing. And we are seeing the nature of unbelief. What has happened for these people is they have clearly seen that Jesus does the things that only God can do.

In fact, if we were to look through the previous 11 chapters, there are seven signs that John shows us that are very, very public. And in those signs, Jesus turns water into wine.

[6 : 42] He heals people of extraordinary physical illness. He feeds 5,000 people from two small fishes and five loaves of bread. He walks on water in a storm.

And he raises Lazarus from the dead. This has just happened. This is God in action. It has to be. Yet here is this general refusal to accept him.

Why is this? Why this sudden change? They have accepted him as their king, said Hosanna to him, coming into Jerusalem, and yet they are now not believing.

Well, the key to it is probably in verse 32. If you jump up there, Jesus has said this. He has said, When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.

And he said this to show by what death he would die. Now, as soon as Jesus says that as king he will die, he will suffer, he will be the servant of all the world, people turn away from him.

[7 : 49] And that's why we see in verse 34 the crowd answering him in disbelief. We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man will be lifted up, will be killed?

Who is this Son of Man? Who do you think you are? You don't fit into our understanding of who the Messiah can be. He can't die. You see, they wanted a king who would bring about political change and immediate change to their circumstances in the way that they want it.

What they could not accept or see is that Jesus came to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And because of that, they can't see that the true God stands in front of them.

And Jesus hides himself from them. Now what's happened here is that things have become personal. God has become personal with the people that he is speaking to.

The assumption that they have is all they need is somebody to lead them, some powerful figure, and things will come together. What they could not accept is that each one of them was lost in their sins and that Jesus had to die for them for their forgiveness and rise in power.

[9 : 12] That's what unbelief is about today and always will be. It is difficult to accept a God who gets personal with us. We don't want spiritual bad news to be revealed to us.

We want to be spiritually self-sufficient. We want to determine who God is and how he should work. And so pride prevents us from accepting God's rescue and our own condition of spiritual death.

And that is a very serious spiritual state to be in. And John talks about this state. He gives a diagnosis of it in the two quotations from Isaiah.

These are very important for us to read because for one thing, John says in verse 39 that, or sorry, in verse 41 that the things that he said, he said because he saw Jesus' glory and he spoke of him.

And that's pointing to the fact that the Old Testament points to Jesus. It is all about Jesus coming as the rescuer of humanity. And so here's what we say.

[10 : 25] We pay attention to it. The rejection of Jesus was predicted by God and it's now fulfilled by Jesus. And so Isaiah said, Lord, who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Now the arm of the Lord, the power of God, has been revealed in Jesus' delight. And many have not believed. And verse 39 says something very difficult.

It says, therefore they could not believe. It's a very sobering verse. They could not believe. This has been fulfilled. And in other words, the I will not believe that we have just heard about, I will not believe in Jesus Christ as the one who saves me, turns into I cannot believe.

And Isaiah describes this cannot in terms of God's own work. So if you look down at verse 40, God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart and turned to me to heal them.

That's another difficult verse. You can't get around what Isaiah is saying very clearly here. God's judgment is that he blinds spiritual eyes and hardens hearts.

[11 : 46] He hides himself from those who refuse to accept what he reveals. And Jesus demonstrates this in his hiddenness from the crowd. And our first thought must be that it is unfair.

Why would God harden hearts and blind eyes? Isn't that taking away their choice? You know, is it just a determinism that we're talking about here?

Well, this passage shows us even as it clearly shows the sovereignty of God over unbelief, that that power over unbelief is never set over against human responsibility.

The two things always go together. We see it throughout Scripture. We see it in the Gospel of John. Jesus is in control. God is in control of all the things, even unbelief. And yet, over and over again, Jesus says, believe.

Believe in me. There's this invitation constantly to place their trust in him. And verse 37 makes this clear, doesn't it? The people did not believe in Jesus.

[12 : 53] And the implication is they should have because of all the signs. Even though they had seen these things, they didn't believe. Verse 43 also shows there's this human motive for unbelief.

And the reason is that the love of human praise takes over. And therefore, it's God's right and good judgment to give them over to the unbelief they have chosen.

And so here, Jesus is actually teaching about himself and the result of it is that people are pushed further into their prideful attitude towards him.

People's hearts are being hardened as he reveals that he will suffer and die for them. When I was thinking about how to explain this a bit further, I thought of an experience I had when I was working in South Dakota in the summer.

And while I was there working, I decided to do the tourist thing and go to one of these very deep caves that they have in the Black Hills of South Dakota. And they have these groups that go down and you take an elevator down quite deep and there's huge caves and they're all lit up with floodlights.

[14 : 08] There's beautiful colors stalactites and stalagmites and whatever all those things are called. It is a beautiful sight and you go through and walk through large caves and then you sit down in an amphitheater and they do a little exercise with you, the park wardens.

They say, close your eyes. So you close your eyes and they say, okay, that's darkness that you usually experience. Now open your eyes and we're going to turn off all the lights. Well, they do that and it's a shocking experience.

I don't know if you've seen, been in a situation where there's absolutely no light but you cannot see the hand in front of your face. There is complete and utter darkness and there is an oppressive sense to it and there is a feeling of relief that goes to the crowd when the lights finally go back on hoping there wasn't a power outage.

It's a bit eerie to experience this thing. It's very memorable. But in this passage we see that in a spiritual sense the people who saw Jesus with these signs closed their eyes.

They willingly closed their eyes to him. And what Jesus did, what God did, was to turn out the lights. This was the judgment of God upon his people.

[15 : 30] And it shows us that there is a deep seriousness to unbelief. There is a spiritual danger that is quite severe. But in that danger, in that situation where God is in control of unbelief, there is good news shining quite clearly.

Because God tells us through Isaiah and John that he is Lord over unbelief, he's in charge of it, and that comes against this weakness we often pretend to see in God.

We limit God and assume that if a person doesn't believe in him, then that person is somehow outside the grace of God, outside God's power and influence. But God's word is saying here that that is not true.

Any unbelief is completely under God's control. And because that is true, we can pray with confidence for those who have rejected Jesus or do not know them.

This is an incredible encouragement for all of us who are praying for those who do not know God to come to a living faith in him. The God who can blind, the God who hardens, we see in verse 40, if you look at that again, is the same God who can make blind eyes see, who can make those people perceive with their heart who once had hard hearts and to heal those who are broken spiritually and dead spiritually.

[17 : 05] That is a great encouragement to be faithful and persistent in our prayers. Keep praying for your children. Keep praying for your friends and your colleagues. Keep looking for openings to share the light of the good news of Jesus Christ.

This is a great motivation for us as a parish family to continue to be about the work of evangelism. Bringing the good news of Jesus to a world that often does not believe.

And the content and purpose of our prayers, it's not that we want other people and friends and family to think the way we do. That's not the point of it. The point we see here in verse 40 is that God might heal them.

Very simply. John Calvin said this about preaching and I think it's true about our prayers and our witness. He said the whole reason is boiled down to this.

That people will, that God will enlighten us in the true knowledge of God, that he will turn us to God and reconcile us to him, that we might be happy and blessed.

[18 : 15] That's the healing that Isaiah saw. And that happiness and blessing, interestingly, is what our world is striving after. And yet, this is the very thing that belief brings to us.

This is what we are about as a church. We want the true knowledge of God to replace unbelief. We desire hard hearts to turn to God and be reconciled to him, so that true happiness and blessing, real healing, will come into the lives of people.

Now, I want to close by saying that this ministry that I've been talking about is a ministry that is towards those who don't know Jesus Christ or who have rejected him.

But the passage here ends with a challenge to each of us about our own unbelief. In verse 42, there's a large group of people who believed in Jesus.

This is an amazing thing. And a number of them were authorities, it says there. But they did not confess that they believed him. They kept it very, very private.

[19 : 22] And I think that this is a lot like our situation here in Canada. There was a poll done. It was in the Vancouver Sun yesterday that said it was done for Easter. And apparently throughout Canada, six out of ten people believe that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of sins.

And I must say that's very good news. But if you think about it, even if, you know, Vancouver has a lower church-going population than the rest of Canada, and let's say there was half that number that professed this thing in Vancouver, if they went to church on Sunday, there would be, and I figured this out because I had to do my math on this, there would be over a hundred churches the size of St.

John's last Easter, yesterday, last Sunday. There would be that many churches full to capacity who were worshipping Jesus Christ.

But of course that isn't true, and what it means that throughout Canada around us, there are many undercover Christians who believe in a certain way but have an incomplete belief, incomplete.

They do not profess that witness. they are afraid for one thing. If you see the leaders here in verse 43, there's the reason here, but for fear in verse 42 of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, lest they be put out of the synagogue.

[20 : 55] And then for another reason, they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. You see what's happening in that culture of leaders, the fear and misplaced love undermine their belief.

belief. And I think this is what happens for us as well. Even us who attend church regularly, we can be afraid of what happens to us if we take our faith too seriously. It means risk.

We stand to lose things that are important to us. But belief is even more difficult because our nature, by nature, we love the praise of people. We love to receive that affirmation.

And so we fall into, not this complete unbelief, but a form of it that is watered down and in which we pull back from true faith in God.

And so the reason we meet together week by week is that we might be strengthened by God's word. When we see Jesus in the Bible, when we are encouraged by the testimony of one another, when we serve God and are ministered to by other people, our belief is strengthened.

[22 : 05] And you know you see this in the lives of Nicodemus. And of Joseph. Both Pharisees, both leaders, and both undercover people in John as Christians.

But as John goes along and unfolds, we see them change. So that by the end of John, they boldly stand up for who Jesus is.

At great risk to themselves. They show their commitment to him. It is faith that has grown because they have seen the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ lived out in Jesus Christ.

And the thing that really does it for them is seeing the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. And so the reason that we meet together is that we might see the gospel of Christ and constantly renew our first love.

A strong belief that will always love the praise from God more than any other praise this world can give. a belief that knows God's healing and the light of his truth.

[23 : 11] And so we should close with the beginning of John that said, yes, there was unbelief. His own did not receive him. But to all who did receive Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent or human desires or husband's will, but born of God.

This is what we pray for. This is what we desire within ourselves. This is what we desire for those around us, that others would become children of God, born of him, because of a true belief that Jesus is the light of the world.

Amen.