

# Do Not Remain In Darkness!

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to John chapter 12. We've made it to the end of John chapter 12, not to the end of our sermon series, but the end of the first half of John's Gospel.

So when you found it there in your Bibles, our text this morning is John 12, 36 through 50. If you would stand and follow along as I read the Word of God. You know, every week I ask you to have your Bibles open.

And this week especially, I mean, we're going to be jumping around several places. So please, John 12, 36 through 50, let's stand in reverence of the Word of God.

While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. So that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?

[ 1 : 10 ] And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, they could not believe. For again, Isaiah said, 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.

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 have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

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 and does not receive my words has a judge.

[ 2 : 23 ] 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 God's word. A lamp for our feet and a light for our path. If you would be seated, let's pray once more. Father, Father, We ask now as I stand here to preach your word.

Would you work through me, a weak servant, To do infinite good for this people. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if that was a new song for you.

God moves in a mysterious way. I listen for the ways that y'all sing. And you actually do pretty good singing new songs. And so sometimes it's hard for me to tell. I could tell this morning. That was a new one for you.

[ 3 : 27 ] I love the lyrics that we just sang. God moves in a mysterious way. His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err. And scan his work in vain. God is his own interpreter. And he will make it plain.

Church, our passage this morning is difficult. This is, there's no way around it. This is a hard text.

I'll confess to you this week as I studied and prepared this text. We've preached maybe 30 something sermons in John so far. This was the hardest text that I had to study.

Up to this point in the gospel of John. We may not love everything that this passage says. We may not understand everything that this passage has to say.

[ 4 : 25 ] But we trust in God's way and God's time that God is his own interpreter. And he will make it plain. We've come to the end of the first half of John's gospel.

And here as John ends the first half, chapters 1 through 12, brings that first half to a close, he zooms out of the narrative and he starts to provide a bit of commentary for us.

John's aim throughout the book, you remember, he's writing these things that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ. And by believing that we might have life in his name.

That's the point of the book. All are invited to believe. And yet John has shown us not all believe. He told us all the way back in chapter 1, verses 11 and 12.

He, Jesus, came to his own people, the Jews, and his own people did not receive him. This is shocking. This unbelief, this rejection.

[ 5 : 25 ] It demands an explanation. But, verse 12, the glorious invitation of the gospel to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

All are invited to believe, yet not all believe. So this morning, as we look at this passage together, I want to ask two questions about belief in Jesus.

This will be our outline this morning. Two questions about belief in Jesus. Question number one, why don't they believe? Question number two, will you?

Question number one, why don't they believe? Question number two, will you? First, why don't they believe?

How do we explain unbelief? Verses 36 through 43 are a condemnation of the unbelief of the Jewish people.

[ 6 : 32 ] We saw last week, Jesus, he called them, he invited them, while you have the light, believe in the light, that you, even you, may become sons of light.

Yet we know that by and large, the Jewish people rejected Jesus. And so John says that when Jesus had said these things, he departed.

He hid himself from them. This withdrawal from them is in itself judgment on their unbelief. One of the major obstacles for the Jews in John's day, as well as in our day, to belief in Jesus, is the question, well, why should we believe that Jesus is the Messiah if all of the Jews, most of the Jews who saw him, who heard him, who were closest and nearest to Jesus, rejected him?

If they rejected him, why should we believe him? Why did they not believe? It's a good question. And John answers that question in two ways.

And we're going to see them both here. The one reason they don't believe is because in their sin, they have chosen willfully to reject the Messiah.

[ 7 : 49 ] There is no excuse for this. They are guilty for this decision. The light of the world walked among them, but instead they rejected the light of the world and chose to live in darkness.

They have loved the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil. That's what John told us, Jesus told us in John chapter 3. That's reason number one. They are willfully in their sin choosing to reject the light.

But he gives us a second reason here. Reason number two, why they don't believe. He says they don't believe because God has hardened their hearts.

So they could not believe, verse 39 tells us. Now the first reason John gives, that's easier for us to understand, isn't it?

We grasp that a little bit better. We have an easier time understanding reason number one. But in explaining the unthinkable rejection of Jesus by his own people, John gives us both explanations here.

[ 8 : 53 ] They have willfully rejected the Messiah in their own sin. And in God's infinite wisdom, this willful rejection was all part of his good, sovereign plan.

Now again, we've seen this throughout the Gospel of John. This isn't new information for us. But again, in this passage, we're coming right up against the tension, the biblical tension, between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

And you remember, we believe both. The Bible teaches both. Our responsibility as Christians is to submit ourselves to the truth of this Word, not to reduce it to our level of understanding.

Some things in this Bible, some things in the Word of God, what he reveals to us, remain a mystery. Which means they're bigger and broader and more mysterious than our limited understanding can grasp.

Nevertheless, he teaches both. And so we believe both. Let's look at both of these reasons here. Reason number one why the Jews didn't believe is because they willfully rejected the light.

[10:06] And whatever the reason for their unbelief, the answer cannot be that they didn't have enough evidence. John tells us in verse 37, he says, Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.

Just recap what we've seen in the first 12 chapters of John's Gospel. This should stun us. Seven signs of his divinity. Seven signs played out right there in the public eye before them.

Do you remember what they were? He turned water into wine. Cleansed the temple. Healed the nobleman's son. Healed the lame man. Fed the 5,000.

Gave sight to the blind man. Raised Lazarus up from the dead. And all while declaring, speaking, saying openly, clearly, I am the bread of life.

I am the light of the world. I am the gate for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. The evidence is overwhelming.

[11:11] Yet, they choose willingly to reject him. This rejection, of course, is no surprise to God. And it shouldn't be a surprise to us either.

If we're familiar with our Old Testament, the rejection of the Jewish people to the Word and the power of God is nothing new. John says in verse 38, this rejection was, in fact, a fulfillment of prophecy.

So he helps us to understand this unbelief by quoting from two passages in Isaiah. This is why I need your Bibles open, because we're going to be flipping there. Keep your place in John chapter 12, but flip over to Isaiah chapter 53.

And this is the first quotation he gives us. You know this passage well. It's the passage of the suffering servant. Isaiah chapter 53, verse 1. That's the first verse quoted there in John.

Again, I'm rambling, so you can get there. I want your eyes on the page. He says, Isaiah was lamenting the fact that his message, the message given him by God to be declared to the Jewish people, was in Isaiah's day, by and large, rejected.

[12:32] John quotes that passage, copies and pastes it into Jesus' day, and says, Nothing has changed. The words of Christ are clear.

Whom has believed what he has heard? And the signs, the arm of the Lord has been clear. To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? And yet, you have rejected it.

700 years of history of the Jewish people, and nothing has changed. John says, The Jewish people have been rejecting God's word and God's power for centuries.

This rejection of Jesus in John's day was preceded and prefigured by another rejection in Isaiah's day. This is nothing new.

Not only this, he goes a little further. John says, This specific rejection of the Messiah, it's not only preceded, it's prophesied by Isaiah 53.

[13:32] This specific rejection of this specific individual, Jesus Christ, was prophesied 700 years before it happened. Look there, Isaiah 53, verse 2.

He says, For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Now, we don't know exactly what Jesus looked like physically. We don't know. But Isaiah draws our attention to something significant here that we should understand, is that Jesus was not attractive.

You know, all of the images, you know what I'm talking about. The television shows, any movie representation of Jesus, they all normally, there is an attractive man, nice, clean, fair skin, nice, straight, white teeth, a beautiful smile, long, luscious locks of hair, perfectly kept beard, muscles for days, blue eyes, soft, beautiful eyes.

[14:57] We don't know exactly what Jesus looked like, but Isaiah tells us, clues us in, that to the physical eye only, he was nothing special. He was not anything special to look at.

No form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him. There was nothing impressive about Jesus to the natural, physical eye.

Why does this matter? Because when Jesus arrives on the scene 700 years later, what happens? The Jews look at him with natural, physical eyes, and they are utterly unimpressed.

What are they looking for? They're looking for a Messiah with a capital M. Someone tall and strong and capable, a political leader, a military leader, someone with charisma, who can gather the people and overthrow the Romans.

They're looking with physical eyes only, and they're unimpressed by what they see. Well, Jesus comes in on a donkey, humble, and lowly.

[16:04] They see him with physical eyes only, and so they reject him. But John explains to us in verse 42 that the issue, it even goes deeper than that.

It goes deeper than simple physical sight. Their rejection of the Messiah ultimately is because they love the glory of man more than the glory of God.

Look there to verse 42. John chapter 12. Flip back there for me. John says, some of the authorities believed in him, but we should be skeptical of the genuineness of this belief because he goes on to say that they wouldn't confess it because they feared the Pharisees.

Why? Verse 43. Because they love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. This is a scathing indictment, and it's true of every non-believer on the planet.

This is the root of all unbelief. It's love. The unbelief is not primarily an intellectual issue. Not mainly.

[17:17] It's a heart issue. You can put all the evidence you want in front of an unbeliever. Seven signs. Resurrection from the dead.

The heavens declare the glory of God. Yet if their eyes are spiritually blind and their heart is spiritually dead, they will not love the glory of God.

They will prefer the darkness and love the glory of man. They do as Romans 1 describes. They exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.

From the heart, they worship and serve whatever it is that they perceive to be beautiful. All of us do. All of us do. You know, we often wonder about our unbelieving friends and family. We just wish. We don't understand. We think they've heard the Word.

[18:18] They've seen the power of God at work. Why won't they believe? I think this tells us that what they need is not necessarily more evidence. The only hope for a non-believer is that God by His grace would give them a new heart that loves His glory more than their sin.

Answer number one. Why don't they believe? John says in the blindness of their sin they don't see the beauty of Christ and they love the darkness rather than the light.

So they don't believe. But John doesn't leave it there, does he? He goes on. He gives us a second reason for their unbelief.

He says, God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. John 12 verse 39. He says, Therefore they could not believe.

Could not believe. For again, Isaiah said, 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.

[19:29] The unbelief of these Jews, it was not just prophesied by Isaiah. John says it was purposed in the wise plan of God.

Here in verse 40, John gives us a second quotation from Isaiah. This time from Isaiah chapter 6. If you flip back there with me to Isaiah chapter 6, you ought to know this passage as well.

This is Isaiah's vision of the glory of God. Do you remember what happened? He sees the glory of the Lord and what does he do? He falls down on his knees and he says, Woe is me.

I am unclean. I am sinful. We are a people of unclean lips. We need atonement. We need forgiveness. And this vision of the glory of the Lord, it changes his life.

He volunteers. He says, Here am I, Lord. Send me out. I want to go tell everyone. Let me be your messenger. Send me out to your people. I want to tell them about your glory. And so he's sent.

[20:33] But the Lord tells him in Isaiah chapter 6, he says, Go and say to this people, what does he say? Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.

Make the heart of this people dull and their eyes heavy and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

Isaiah is sent to proclaim a message of sin and judgment for sin and glory. And God says, Be prepared because this message, as you preach it, will not be received.

In fact, the message itself will harden and blind those who hear it. What was the message? Flip back to John chapter 12 and make the connection with me.

What was the message that Isaiah preached? Look at John 12 verse 41. What does it say? Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

[ 21 : 44 ] Whose glory? Whose glory is John pointing us to here in this passage? John, I believe, is telling us that Isaiah saw the glory of the Son of God.

It was Jesus' glory that Isaiah beheld. Isaiah beheld the glory of the Son of God. He preached of the glory of the Son of God.

He preached a message of the glory of the Messiah. That's who he saw. That's who he proclaimed. He proclaimed a glory of a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

Not the Messiah they wanted. Not the Messiah they thought was coming. Not the strong-armed military leader conquering king. A message of a Messiah who will come and suffer for the sins of his people because their sin has earned judgment.

God knowingly, purposefully sent an unimpressive, undesirable, even an offensive Messiah.

[ 22 : 54 ] The one who didn't play by the Jewish customs, didn't come from the Jewish schools, didn't look like what they thought the Messiah would look like. He did so purposefully, sovereignly, knowing that apart from a gracious change of heart, this Christ would be rejected.

Therefore, John says, they could not believe. But this rejection was purposeful in the mind of God. But we need to ask, why would God do this? Why would God work out His plan of redemption in this way?

And here again, to be perfectly honest with you, I don't completely know the answer. This is a mystery. Paul calls the gospel a mystery.

Who can know the mind of God? God moves in mysterious ways. But I do have a few thoughts. As I was studying this passage, I flipped through a few commentaries, especially in difficult passages like this.

[ 24 : 01 ] I love to read people who are smarter than me, which gives me a lot of material to sift through. And I found one this week from D.A. Carson, who I love. I love D.A. Carson.

He listed out four considerations. Four considerations. If it's okay with you, I'm going to summarize his points because he writes like he's smarter than me. So four considerations. Consideration number one. God's sovereignty is never contrary to human responsibility.

God's sovereignty is never contrary to human responsibility. I hope we've seen this. And yes, again, this is beyond our comprehension. Our minds can't reconcile this completely, but the Bible holds both together and so should we.

No one is sent to hell in innocence or against their will. We, in our natural state, apart from the grace of God, our default mode is to love the darkness and hate the glory of God.

All of us are guilty. Consideration number two. God's hardening of sinners is giving them exactly what they want.

[ 25 : 14 ] God's hardening of sinners is giving them exactly what they want. A willful rejection of God, it brings about His judgment and is, at the same time, it is His judgment.

Unbelief not only earns the judgment of God, but persistent unbelief is the judgment of God. Often, the way that God judges a sinner's love of darkness is by saying, you can have exactly what you want.

Jesus, the light of the world, hides Himself. Consideration number three. God's sovereignty and salvation is the only hope we have.

God's sovereignty over salvation is the only hope we have. If God is not in complete control, why do we pray and ask Him to save the lost?

God's sovereignty and salvation combined with His heart of mercy, combined with His inclination towards grace, combined with His desire to save sinners seen supremely at the cross of Christ, His reason for hope and confidence and prayer and faithfulness in evangelism.

[ 26 : 35 ] It's the only hope that we have that any sinner might be saved. Consideration number four. God has a plan for good.

The mystery of the gospel, the plan from before the ages began, was for the Son of God to enter into His own creation, to live perfectly in the place of sinners, to die in the place of sinners and to rise from the grave, to offer eternal life to the world.

His rejection at the hands of the Jews is in ways beyond our comprehension, all part of the plan. In God's wisdom, as Paul argues in Romans, through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Through their trespass, salvation has come to you and to me. The Great Commission, that to go therefore and make disciples of all nations, is made possible in the wisdom of God by the rejection of the Jewish Messiah.

As Paul says again in Romans 11, a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and in this way, all Israel will be saved.

[ 28 : 01 ] There are a hundred sermons to preach from that verse, but just know this. God is not sitting on His hands hoping that His plan of salvation just works out on its own. God is working it out and it will not fail.

And the wisdom of God, the rejection of Israel, opens up the invitation for all the world to hear and believe the message of the gospel and receive eternal life.

Which brings us to question number two. Will you believe it? Will you believe it? Verse 44, as you're reading this passage, it just sort of comes out of nowhere, doesn't it?

It seems sudden. It seems abrupt. We don't know where Jesus went. We don't know where He's hidden Himself. We don't know who He's speaking to here. But I think that that is part of the point. John's wrapping up this section of this gospel and Jesus is calling out to anyone who would hear. He's speaking to you this morning. He says, whoever believes in Me, believes not in Me, but in Him who sent Me. Whoever sees Me, sees Him who sent Me.

[ 29 : 18 ] I have come into this world as light so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness. This is a free and broad and gracious and wide invitation to anyone who would hear that you are welcome to come to Christ.

You are invited to have your sins forgiven, to be washed clean, to be made right with God, to be made new and to receive eternal life.

See, from God's perspective, He alone knows who will be saved because He alone is the one who works salvation. It's His work. We don't have that perspective.

From our perspective, we don't share God's sovereign knowledge of all things. We don't know who will be saved and who will reject the Gospel. So what do we do? We do as Christ does in these verses.

We call sinners to faith in Christ. We go to the ends of the earth and we scatter the seed of the Gospel broadly, freely, with confidence that rejection does not stop the plan of God.

[ 30 : 25 ] Some seed will fall on rocky soil. Some seed will grow up among the thorns. But we praise God that some seed will bear fruit. So we go.

Now our privilege in light of the sovereignty of God is to proclaim the message of Jesus as freely and as broadly and as openly as we possibly can, trusting that even through weak vessels like us, God will work salvation.

Him we proclaim. Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we might present everyone mature in Christ. For all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

This is our message, church. Will you believe it? And will you call upon His name and be saved?

The late Scottish pastor, John Murray, He says it much better than I can.

Listen to this. Imagine it with a Scottish accent. He says, It is by the sovereign grace that He is so freely offered. Sovereign grace is not then incompatible with the free offer of the gospel.

[ 31 : 40 ] It is rather sovereign grace that makes the gospel free. The fount of grace freely offered is grace sovereignly devised and framed. And not only is sovereign grace the fount, but sovereign grace is also the stream on the bosom of which Christ is born to the very door of our responsibility and opportunity.

To change the figure, but a little, it is upon the crest of the wave of the sovereignty of God that the free and full overtures of Christ in the gospel break upon the shores of lost humanity.

Isn't that beautiful? We want everyone to listen and consider and believe what Jesus says about Himself here in verses 44 through 50.

Look there with me. What does He say? He says, To believe in Jesus is to believe in God. You cannot have one without the other.

Whoever believes in Me believes not in Me, but in Him who sent Me. Jesus Christ was sent by God to be the revelation of God in the world.

[ 32 : 50 ] The living Word of God made flesh. Jesus says, I and the Father are one. I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Will you believe this? He says, To see Jesus is to see God. Whoever sees Me sees Him who sent Me. We'll see you in a few weeks, Lord willing.

As we get to John chapter 14, Philip asks Him, Lord, just show us the Father and it's enough for us. You remember this conversation? And how did Jesus respond? Have I been with you so long and yet you still don't know Me, Philip?

Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. Will you believe this? Will you look to Jesus not just as a man, not just as a prophet, not just as a moral example, but look to Him as the very Son of God Himself in the flesh?

Would you plead with your non-believing friends? Will you see Jesus for who He is? He says, To believe in Jesus is to be in the light and to reject Him is to remain in darkness.

[ 34 : 00 ] The call of the Gospel is this. Would you come out of your sinful darkness? Would you turn from your sin? Would you not remain in darkness?

Would you leave it behind? Would you love the glory of God more than the glory of man? Would you love the light more than the darkness? He can do it. He can change your heart so you love what's eternally good and turn from what's eternally foolish.

Would you come to the light? We call them to believe and to come to Christ. And we call them with urgency because he says to reject Jesus is to reject God.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge them for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge.

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.

[ 35 : 06 ] You cannot love God and reject Jesus. Despite what our Jehovah's Witness friends say when they come knocking on the door, you cannot say you know God and yet deny that Jesus is who He says He is.

If you reject Jesus, you reject God. And Jesus says if you leave here rejecting my words, I'm not here to judge you just yet but when I return, these very words that you have rejected will be the grounds of your judgment on the last day.

To reject Jesus is to reject God but He says to receive Jesus is to receive eternal life.

Look there to verse 50. He says, I know, He says in verse 50 that His commandment is eternal life. Will you believe this?

The invitation of the gospel is free and available for any sinner who hears and heeds the call of Christ to come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[ 36 : 20 ] Will you believe this? Church, Church, I love this difficult passage because it helps us to see that God's sovereignty and salvation and the free offer of the gospel go hand in hand.

They are friends. And we may not fully grasp the mystery of how these truths work together but please don't make the mistake of reducing God's mystery to our level of understanding.

God is sovereign. We are responsible. And the offer of the gospel is freely made to any sinner who would hear.

You may have heard of William Carey. He's known as the father of modern missions. Do you know that name? He came to a gathering of other Baptist pastors and he said, brothers, if we founded a missionary society and we worked together, if we pulled our funds together and put our minds together, we could reach the ends of the earth with the gospel.

We could establish the Baptist missionary society and we could reach the ends of the world. And the chairman of the council replied, he said, son, sit down.

[ 37 : 39 ] When God is pleased to convert the heathen, he will do it without your help or mine.

Thankfully, William Carey had a much more accurate theology of God's sovereignty and the mission of evangelism than the chairman.

He went to the nations with confidence in a sovereign God with a zeal to share the gospel with the lost. Listen to what he wrote in 1805 as we close. He said, we are firmly persuaded that Paul might plant in Apollos water in vain in any part of the world did not God give the increase.

We are sure that only those ordained to eternal life will believe and that God alone can add to the church such as shall be saved. Nevertheless, we cannot but observe with admiration that Paul, the great champion for the glorious doctrine of free and sovereign grace, was the most conspicuous for

his personal zeal in the word of persuading men to be reconciled to God.

In this respect, he is a noble example for our imitation. Let's pray. God, we praise you for your wisdom.

We praise you for your power, for your sovereignty that while we don't necessarily understand how you work, Lord, the mystery of salvation, we trust and we know that you are good and you are sovereign working all things out according to the counsel of your will.

[ 39 : 17 ] And we pray, Lord, if there are any here who are rejecting the message of the gospel and living in unbelief, we pray that you would even now turn their hearts to love the glory of God.

We pray for our non-believing friends and family and neighbors, those in our community who don't know you to the ends of the earth. We pray, God, by your grace, would you save them, turn them to Christ, we ask, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.