

# The Offer of Light to Hardened Hearts – *John 12:34-50*

**Introduction** – Advent and Christmas season in the world is strange. We go hear *The Messiah* in a hall of musicians, many of whom do not know who they are singing about or worse, hate who they are singing about. “Joy to the World” is played in retail stores (remember them?) where no one believes that “*He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.*” And yet, He has and He is. “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*” (John 1:4-5).

We come to John’s record of Jesus’ final public appeal to the people of Israel and there is a similar “strangeness” in the air. He will then depart and not be seen publicly until His trial and crucifixion (v36). Here is a summary of sorts of His entire message as presented by John. “*A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you*” (v35).

**Overview** – Following Jesus’ statement that He would be lifted up from the earth (v33) the people replied that the law taught that the Messiah would remain forever (v34). Jesus didn’t answer directly but solemnly warned that the light is with them only a little while longer and that they should believe now in the light before it is too late (vv35-36). John then tells us that Jesus departed and was hidden from them (v36). Many who had seen the signs did not believe in Him (v37) which was just what Isaiah had prophesied (vv38-40) when He had seen the glory of the LORD (v41). There were some among the rulers who did secretly believe, fearing the Pharisees, for they still loved the praise of men (vv42-43).

Lastly, John records a final cry of Jesus (we don’t know who the audience was, as though it may have been written this way for the reader of the Gospel). To believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father and to see the Father (vv44-45). Jesus has come into the world as the light so that whoever believes should not abide in darkness (v46). He does not judge those who do not believe for His present mission is to save and not to judge, but His Word will judge them in the last day (vv47-48). The reason for this is that He has spoken only what the Father has commanded, and His command is everlasting life (vv49-50).

**Confusion, Unbelief, Hidden Belief** – Here is what John leaves us with at the end of Jesus’ public ministry of three years – “... how can You say, ‘*The Son of Man must be lifted up?*’”(v34)” “...they did not believe in Him (v37),” “...among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him...for they loved the praise of men...(v42-43)”

**The Confused** – They knew some verses spoke of the Messiah remaining forever (Isaiah 9:6-7, Mic 4:7), but Jesus knew their questions were not out of seeking truth but of distancing themselves from Him. Many times, unbelief is not an issue of honest seeking, but stifling the truth with smoke-screen questions. To reject the light in such a way is to be plunged into greater darkness – something we witness in individuals and in cultures as well (v35).

**Who Has Believed our Report?** – Although Jesus had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him (v37), which was exactly God’s plan. Isaiah foretold this confusion and unbelief. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the glory of God and described what that glory was (Isaiah 6:1-4). He thought he would die for seeing this (v5) and an atonement is made for him (vv6-7). John says in v41 that this was the glory of Jesus that Isaiah saw and spoke of (12:41). Verse 40 is a paraphrase of Isaiah 6:9-10 where Isaiah (and later Jesus) is given a ministry of speaking to hard hearts who will not see or hear what is being plainly done and spoken before them.

The previous quote is from Isaiah 53:1 and the following section of Isaiah 53 describes in detail why no one would be drawn to this Savior, not by any natural drawing (53:1-6). This passage on the suffering servant so clearly points to the crucifixion of Jesus that Jewish rabbis have struggled to carefully discard these verses or reinterpret them to not apply to Jesus, “*for they love the praise of men more than the praise of God*” (John 12:43). Who would want to believe on a Messiah who was rejected both by Israel and the Gentiles, scourged, humiliated, and nailed to a cross?

**Hard Hearts and God’s Glory** - “*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death*” (Acts 2:22-23). You see, man has free will to follow his heart, but his heart is darkened, and he will not turn to the light because he does not freely desire to do so. And God predetermined to use this darkened will to put the Lord of glory to death and bring salvation to the world. This is all foolishness and confusion to the natural man (1 Cor 2:13-14). There is nothing to reconcile between the doctrine of Man’s Free Will and God’s Exhaustive Sovereignty when God is infinite, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. But that will always also mean that He is beyond our full ability to comprehend Him and His ways (Rom 11:33).

This perspective of Jesus being lifted up is so different than we expect. When Jesus is getting on the Cross He is getting on His throne. He is glorified while being humiliated. We see a man born blind. Jesus sees the glory of God. We see Lazarus dead and cold in the tomb and people mourning. Jesus sees the glory of God. We see the Son of Man lifted up on a Cross. God sees the glory of His Son.

For us, the ultimate goal seems to be to remove all suffering and hardship. And the regular argument against the existence of God is all the evil and suffering in the world. But first, Jesus sees sin and suffering as the stage by which God's glory will be demonstrated. And second, the reason there remains so much evil and suffering upon individuals and nations is because so many have still not come to the light; they love the praise of men more than the praise of God, they love the darkness, and that darkness brings forth wrath.

**Breaking the Spell with the “Good-spell”** – In a world of unbelief and hardened hearts, where is this all going? *“And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak”* (v50). Jesus spoke the words the Father commanded. He did the signs His Father put in front of Him to do. John wrote this Gospel. Paul wrote many of the passages recited above on the sovereignty of God and the hardness of unbelieving hearts. Peter preached that sermon on Pentecost. And yet all of them found this to be a message of hope for the salvation of the world and not a message of final judgment. Gospel is a play off an old English word, “goodspell” and describes what happens by means of the proclaimed word. Peter would write, *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”* (2 Pet 1:19). And for all believers, all who walk in the light, there is a glory preserved for you in the resurrection which can only today be apprehended by faith. *“What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory...”* (Rom 9:22-23). He has prepared you, in Christ, for glory. The cross proves it. And your hardships confirm it.

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