



INTERPRETING THE SIGNS

READING JOHN'S GOSPEL

**SESSION 22:
LOVING THE GLORY THAT COMES FROM GOD
JOHN 12:36-50**

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LOVING THE GLORY THAT COMES FROM GOD

SESSION 22

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What is the difference between the events fulfilling the prophecies about Jesus and the events coming to pass in order to fulfill the word of God?
2. How does it enhance your understanding of the Old Testament to know that the visible manifestations of the God in the Old Testament were Jesus?
3. Are there other valid reasons for not confessing Jesus than the one mentioned by John--that they loved the glory from man rather than that of God? If so, what are they and explain why they are valid.

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

This final passage is John’s epilogue, or summary statement, of Jesus’ public ministry. What he says here is of great significance in understanding John’s intent and purposes about Jesus’ ministry to this point. Readers must pay special attention to the things John addresses here because it will wrap up how he, as the disciple closest to Jesus, understood what an appropriate response to Jesus should be. At this point, the public had no further access to Jesus. He was done preaching. He was done performing signs. It would have been impossible to follow him or ask him any further questions. As we read and meditate on these verses, we would do well to put ourselves into that situation. We should be asking ourselves, “How am I responding to Jesus knowing what I know now?”

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Passage:

John 12:36-50, Isaiah 53:1, Isaiah 6:10

Think Through the Questions:

1. According to John, why did Israel not believe?
2. What is glory? What does it mean that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory?
3. What does it mean that the believers in Jesus loved the glory from man rather than the glory that comes from God?
4. Do you think of God and Jesus the same?

Using the questions, summarize the teaching of the passage.

COMMENTARY

Jesus' last statements were the final warnings to Israel urging them to believe in him while they still had the chance while he was on the earth. After making these statements, Jesus hid. His hiding wouldn't be for long, but it would be long enough to pass on his final instructions to his disciples, which is the subject of the coming chapters. But to conclude this period of Jesus ministry, John inserts a few final comments of his own as well as a final statement from Jesus as an indictment against the nation of Israel.

The first thing on John's mind is Israel's response to Jesus, and he is quite clear and simple. Jesus had performed many signs, but yet Israel did not believe in him. Its ruling council had concluded that Jesus was a problem for the nation and that he must be killed. Jesus was under a death sentence. He had come to protect and provide for Israel, but they in turn wanted to kill him. While this may appear to be a wrinkle in God's plan, John wants the reader to be sure that God's plan has not been thwarted, and that Israel's response was expected. To show this, John quotes Isaiah twice. The first one states:

Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

This quote is from Isaiah 53:1. Its immediate context is a passage describing the suffering servant of God, which is Jesus. Without doing an exhaustive commentary on Isaiah 53, it is important to establish a few points stressed by Isaiah, which was written approximately 700 years before Jesus' time on earth.

First of all, Isaiah makes the point that the kings of many nations would respond to Jesus as he was "sprinkled" among them. He also states these nations would "see" what had not been shown them and understand what they have not heard. (Isaiah 52:15). What Isaiah is clearly stating is that those places that did not have the full revelation of Jesus would respond in reverence to him. Second, Isaiah states that Israel will reject Jesus. The verse included in John 12 is the statement in Isaiah 53:1. This verse expresses a contrasting picture introducing how Jesus' preaching and signs would be received by Israel. The statement, "what has been heard," refers to the words spoken by Jesus and the statement, "the arm of the Lord," refers to miracles performed by Jesus.

The rest of the passage, specifically Isaiah 53:3, states that Israel would reject and despise Jesus. In contrast to the nations' response of belief with little revelation, Israel would reject Jesus in the midst of abundant revelation, consisting of spoken words and miraculous signs.

Israel had to respond in disbelief in order to fulfill the Scripture, which is the Word of God. This is clearly stated in v.39. This does not minimize the personal responsibility of Israel, for v.37 clearly states their responsibility. We'll come back to this in a moment. John continues with a quote from Isaiah 6:10:

He has blinded his eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

This verse is in context with God's calling of Isaiah as a prophet to Israel. When many people think of prophets, they think of those that are primarily responsible to tell the future. While that is partially true, the great majority of their work consisted of calling Israel back to faithfulness to God. The same goes with church leaders today (Ephesians 4:11). Isaiah was called to urge Israel back to faithfulness to God. However, the result of Isaiah's preaching would not be repentance, but hardening. Isaiah's work would cause Israel to become more hardened and stubborn to God. Isaiah's entire life would be characterized by Israel rejecting and despising what he said.

Jesus experienced the same dynamic. The more he preached, the more he was rejected and despised to the point where the official ruling council determined to put him to death. However, there is a sense to these verses, in both Isaiah and in John, that is somewhat startling to many readers—the notion that God Himself hardened Israel against belief and repentance. Why would this be the case? It is important to see these verses in context with Israel's history as a nation. From the inception of Israel as a nation, they were a people most characterized by rebellion against God, idolatry, immorality, and violence. Israel existed in these states for centuries and it showed several things. First, it showed that they were unable to faithfully follow God without a new heart and new spirit. It also showed that they were incapable of fulfilling their purpose to be a blessing to the nations. God promised that someday they would receive a new heart and spirit that would give them the ability to follow God and be a blessing to the nations, but it

required a plan. The plan required Israel's rejection of Jesus, for only Jesus' death and resurrection could provide the means for the regeneration of Israel. If God did not harden them, they would continue the cycle of unfaithfulness, repentance, and unfaithfulness that had been going on for centuries. A final hardening was required, and this final hardening would lead to the death of Jesus. It would also lead to the eternal life of Israel and the nations of the world. This argument is also more clearly explained in Romans 9-11.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, D.A. Carson presents four important points to consider when faced with the reality of God's hardening.¹

1. God's sovereign will is never set against human responsibility.
2. God's hardening is not the work of an "arbitrary potentate cursing morally neutral or morally pure beings, but as a holy condemnation of guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen."
3. God's sovereign power and will is a cause for hope, for if he is not sovereign over these things, how could we ask or expect any help from him at all?
4. God's hardening is part of the "strange work" of God in bringing his plan to pass, which is the argument I have presented above.

John then makes an amazing statement regarding Isaiah and Jesus. The text says that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of these things. That would then mean that Isaiah then saw Jesus in his pre-incarnate form—he saw Jesus before he came to earth. It also means that it was Jesus who was hardening Israel. This further establishes the inseparable and unified connection between Jesus and the Father, which is one of the themes significantly stressed in John's gospel.

Regardless of Jesus' hardening of Israel, many people, including some from among the authorities, believed. But their belief was shallow and fickle. Fearing the Pharisees and the potential rejection from the synagogue, which was the center of Jewish social life at this time, most of these believers did not confess their belief in Jesus. Ultimately, they loved the glory that comes from men rather than the glory that comes from God. This is an important point in John's gospel. As humans, we aspire to the reception of glory. We want honor shown to us. We want

praises for who we are and what we do. We want magnificence attributed to us for our accomplishments and capabilities. However, the source of the glory shown us is of great importance. John positions humanity as having two potential sources of glory. They can receive glory from man or they can receive glory from God. Those who seek the honor and glory from man will fall in line with the wishes and desires of man. They will be enslaved to the manipulations and coercions and deceptions of man in order to receive praise and attention from man. Being considered worthy of honor in the eyes of man will consume peoples' desires and lead them away from following God. Those who glorify those who seek the glory of man are people who affirm godlessness and are simply striving to build support for their own evil deeds and desires. In contrast, those who seek honor and glory from God will fall in line with the wishes and desires of God. Instead of being enslaved to the wills of other people, they will be enslaved to life-giving righteousness in service to God. Following God will consume them and God will bring honor to them. Some will experience this honor in their lives on earth, but some, like Isaiah and Jesus, will be rejected in this life and find honor primarily in the life to come in the glorification that comes from God.

This specifically works out in regards to confessing Jesus. Those who confess Jesus before the world are those who seek the glory that comes from God. They desire to please God and testify to the truth of His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that believers in Jesus not only have to recognize their need for Jesus as the Son of God, but that in turn they must be willing to testify to others about Jesus. As is seen here, many people believed in Jesus but didn't follow through with the willingness to testify about Jesus. Ultimately, these people will be saved, but they will receive a limited amount of honor from God because of their unwillingness to confess their faith in Jesus.

John includes the final seven verses as a summary of Jesus testimony to the world. John isn't clear as to when Jesus made these statements, and it is unimportant to determine that. The passage makes the following points:

- Belief in Jesus means belief in God the Father.
- Those who see Jesus see God the Father.
- Those who believes in Jesus no longer remain under the deception of darkness, but sees his sin and is no longer a slave to it.

- Those who hear Jesus' words but do not keep them will ultimately be judged by Jesus' words on the last day.
- Jesus' words and ministry were the fulfillment of God's commandment to him, and Jesus fulfilled that commandment perfectly.

John emphasizes Jesus' connection to God the Father throughout this gospel and its readers must understand that Jesus and God are one and that to be in the favor of God is to believe in and follow the words of Jesus, for Jesus' words were from God. Failure to keep those words will result in judgment on the last day.

THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES

As John transitions to the portion of the gospel intended for those who are believers in Jesus, we must evaluate our condition. Are we coming into this instruction as believers in Jesus who desire to follow him and confess his name? Or, are we in a state of disbelief? Or, are we believing but yet remain primarily motivated by the glory that comes from man rather than that of God, making us worthless in the work of Jesus in the world? Let's use the following questions and exercises to evaluate ourselves and strengthen our willingness to believe in and follow Jesus' words.

Issue: Loving the Glory that Comes from God

1. Where are you at in your belief in Jesus? Do you believe in him? Why or why not?
2. If you are a believer in Jesus, how would you characterize your witness of Jesus? Is it one of faithful and consistent testimony or is it characterized by little or non-existent confession?
3. How do you think of "the last day" (v.48)? What do you think it will be like when you stand before God and are called to account for the way you live your life?

Respond to the Questions Below:

DINNER TABLE DISCUSSION GUIDE

MEAL #1: BELIEF

Read John 12:37 and review 2-3 of the signs Jesus performed.

1. Why do you think people failed to believe in Jesus?

MEAL #2: GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL

Read John 12:37-40

1. What does it mean to “blind the eyes?”
2. What does it mean to “harden the hearts?”
3. Why would God blind the eyes and harden the hearts of Israel?

MEAL #3: LOVING THE GLORY FROM GOD

Read John 12:41-43

Think of an example where you did something because it would please the people around you, but it wasn't the right thing to do. Explain how this is “loving the glory from man” rather than “loving the glory from God.” Ask and see if others want to share a similar experience. Then discuss situations where you and other family members have done the right thing because Jesus wanted you to, but it resulted in people making fun of or slandering you.

MEAL #4: CONFESSING JESUS

Read John 12:41-43

1. Why is difficult to confess Jesus to other people?
2. Discuss what it will be like to stand before God on the last day and give an account of our lives. Ask your family what they would rather experience, God being pleased with them or them being ashamed to stand before God.

SERMON NOTES



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