

Jesus is the Christ (from John's gospel) # 43 (Matters of Life & Death # 9)

## John 12<sup>35-43</sup>

# When people hate the light

God's purpose in the rejection of Jesus



Today's text is **not easy** one - talk about **God blinding people's eyes so they won't be saved**

- many Christians would put it in the "too hard" basket;
  - not only conveniently ignore it,
  - but in end undermine it – teach something quite opposed to it;
- but in apostle John's mind it is crucial to understanding Jesus' ministry;
  - crucial to understanding God's grand plan of salvation of sinners;
  - crucial to John – because crucial to Jesus;
- so we have to put in the effort to understand this – try to understand it well.

(Context)

To understand Bible text well you always need to take good account of the Biblical **context**;

- over page is **ch 13**: beginning of in-depth account of Jesus' final night alive;
  - private – just Jesus w His disciples;
- so **ch 12** marks end of Jesus' 3 years of public ministry;
- our text today opens w these words:
  - (36) **When Jesus had said these things, He departed & hid Himself from the.**
- Jesus has said His last words of public ministry – about 5 days out from His death;
  - departs – goes into hiding for final few days;
  - we see nothing of Him – hear nothing from Him for these few days;
  - we not told where He went / what He did;
  - not surprising if it was few days of intense personal preparation for death;
    - but we not told;
- but we are told something – we not quite at end of chapter yet;
  - So what do we have from here to end of chapter, if Jesus is in hiding?**
  - = seems to be John's **reflective summary** of Jesus' ministry.

Before we look at it:

- I want to take you back to beginning of **John's** gospel;
- because what we see there connects strikingly w what we see here:
  - @ beginning    ∋ anticipation of Jesus' ministry
  - @ end            ∋ reflective summary of Jesus' ministry.

## Anticipation of Jesus' ministry

**John 1(9)** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

The Light has come

(10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him,  
yet the world did not know Him.

(11) He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

The Light is rejected by His own

(12) But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name,  
He gave the right to become children of God,

(13) who were born, not of blood nor of will of the flesh nor of will of man, but of God.

The Light is received by many

Now turn back to our text in **John 12** for ...

## Reflective summary of Jesus' ministry

And notice **Jesus' last words** – just before He went into hiding - look out for His theme:

(35) So Jesus said to them,

*“The light is among you for a little while longer.*

*Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you.*

*The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.*

(36) *While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.*”

- theme in Jesus' final words is the Light – He is the Light of the world;

- same theme as in **ch 1**

(36) When Jesus had said these things, He departed and hid Himself from them.

The Light departs & hides

(37-43) = heart of our text for today – will consider in detail in moment.

The Light is rejected by His own

(44-50) = our text for next week

(46) I have come into the world as light,

so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

The Light is received by many

So you see the **symmetry** / **balance** / **harmony**;

- John is giving us summation of both +<sup>ve</sup> / -<sup>ve</sup> outcomes of Jesus' ministry;

- both reception / rejection;

- both belief / unbelief;

- both love / hate;

- at beginning He anticipated +<sup>ve</sup> / -<sup>ve</sup> outcomes;

- now at end as He reflects: gives +<sup>ve</sup> / -<sup>ve</sup> outcomes;

- what we consider today (-<sup>ve</sup> outcome) – has to be considered in this context;

- part of this bigger picture – balance w +<sup>ve</sup> side next week.

[X]

Consideration

## Rejection of Jesus & His ministry

This is what we see **all the way through** our text:

(37) Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him.

(39) They could not believe.

## Big Q is: **Why was Jesus rejected?**

- text here in (37-41) is full of the answer;
- reasons given – logically presented – look out for logical connectors:
- (37) **They still did not believe in him,**
- (38) **so that** the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:  
*“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,  
 and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*
- (39) **Therefore** they could not believe.
- For again** Isaiah said,
- (40) *“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.”*
- (41) Isaiah said these things **because** he saw His glory and spoke of Him. [X]

## Why was Jesus rejected?

- His ultimate answer:
  - because **God planned** it that way;
  - because God prophesied it that way;
  - because God orchestrated it that way;
  - because God ensured it happened that way;
  - because of God;
  - because God is God.

## Because of God’s grand plan

### **Intrinsic** to God’s plan:

- Jesus is creator of the world;
- Jesus says Let there be light – there was light;
- Jesus came as Light of the world;
- **He was in the world, and the world was made through Him,  
 yet the world did not know Him.**
- **He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.**
- crucial to **verification of Word of God** as Word of God:
  - prophecy of all that would unfold in scheme of redemption;
  - fulfilment of every aspect of prophesied plan;
  - unwitting fulfilment by those who did not realise they fulfilling it;
    - this too prophesied;
    - in hindsight – proved to be all of God.
- crucial that **Jesus had to die**;
  - but not some arbitrary death;
  - crucial that He die violently / judicially / at hands of His own people;
  - crucial that they sin grievously against Him in putting Him to death;
  - crucial as He takes that sin upon Himself – suffer for it – die for it;
    - rise triumphant to conquer / overcome it;
    - atone for v sin of rejecting / renouncing / repudiating Him;
    - reconcile worst of sinners to Himself & to God.

This is God’s great / glorious / **grand plan** of salvation for sinners.

- this is ultimate answer for why people blinded / Jesus is rejected.

But worth our while to go digging a bit deeper - into particulars of text:

Why John chooses to quote from 2 particular passages of Isaiah to prove point?

How do they help us understand / appreciate / appropriate truths to ourselves?

- both have something to do w glory - glory of Light of world.

(37) They still did not believe in him,

(38) so that the word spoken by the prophet **Isaiah** might be fulfilled:

*“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,*

*and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*

- if you as slow as me – it may not be immediately obvious:

How is this fulfilled by people seeing many signs / failing to believe?

- maybe we need to look at context – get sense of what this Isa passage all about.

(Because of God’s type of glory)

Here it is w quoted verse highlighted in middle (already read):

Isa 52(13) Behold, my servant shall act wisely;

he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

(14) As many were astonished at you -

his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and

his form beyond that of the children of mankind -

(15) So shall he sprinkle many nations;

kings shall shut their mouths because of him;

for that which has not been told them they see,

and that which they have not heard they understand.

**(1) Who has believed what they heard from us?**

**And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

∩ few things to notice here:

- begins w prophecy of Servant being lifted up / exalted;

Does that ring a bell w you?

Does that sound anything like what heard Jesus say last week in prev passage?

John 12(32) I [will be] lifted up from the earth.

- lifted up on cross

- but also lifted up in glory- exalted executing glorious plan redemption;

- then his appearance was marred

- ends w no form or majesty that we should look at him / desire him;

- they want a v different form of majesty / glory;

So what happens? - they despise / reject him

- this is not type of glory they want – glory of suffering servant – man of sorrows;

- they expect / want / demand a glory that fulfils their plans / ambitions for Israel;

= why they will not believe – fulfil what Isaiah said they would do. [X]

(39) Therefore they **could not believe**. For again **Isaiah** said ...

(40) *"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."*

(Because of God's blinding them with glory)

This can **sound** really **unfair / unjust**;

- God blinding people
- God hardening people's hearts;
- God doing this so that so can't see / understand / believe / turn / be healed / saved.
- sounds mean / evil / despotic.

We need to **look further** into this – we need to go to **Isaiah 6**:

- commissioning of Isaiah as prophet
- Isaiah is shown vision of glory of God – Lord sitting on throne in temple;
- angels declaring Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, whole earth full of His glory.
- Lord saying "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"
- Isaiah said: Here I am, send me;
- God says Go;
- but message he given to take to people is not what might expect:

(9) say to this people:

*"Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive."*

(10) *Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears 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."*

- again seems really unfair / unjust / mean / evil. [X]

But ∃ **context** here which makes something of a difference;

- this is **Isa 6**
- prev 5 chapters been describing rebellious way people were responding to God;
  - insulting / despising;
- God saying:
 

1(18) *"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;*
- they respond w more insulting / despising;
- sinning against light / glory of God's grace;
- **hardening** in **ch 6** is **response to own hardening** of own hearts;
- God shining light / glory of gospel on them;
  - captivated Isaiah w vision of glory – commission him to proclaim glory;
- (41) **Isaiah said these things** because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

They **blinded by light**;

[X]

- but only because going wrong way – going against God – not w God.
- this is certainly how it was for Jews of Jesus' day: Light was in world;
  - sinning against light of world – suppressing light of world;
  - blinded by Light because intent on going against / exterminating Light.

That might help us somewhat in our understanding;

- but I suspect words here **still grate a bit w you** – as they still do w me;

Word in text that **I struggle** w most is **lest**:

- seems to suggest : people would turn / be healed- but God stops them;
- something : might help us w this:
  - specific example God gives us of **Pharaoh** in time of Moses;
    - hardened his heart – would not God’s people go / worship God;
    - God sent plague after plague;
    - each time he would turn / relent – say could go;
    - so God would relent – remove plague
    - but heart still hard – refuse to let people go;
    - in end – God hardened his heart – no more turning;
    - time for God to send angel of death – kill firstborn;
      - Passover for all who trust Him
    - but Pharaohs heart hard – won’t turn / can’t turn;
- Why?** Because God is declaring glory of gospel;
- some just don’t want it no matter what.

We’d better get back to our text in **John 12** – seems to be something of **turning point**:

(Because of being seduced by a substitute glory)

**(42)** Nevertheless, many even of the **authorities believed** in him;

- this is looking like glimmer of hope:
- sounding like genuine acceptance;
- but read on - ∃ “but”

**but for fear** of the Pharisees they did not confess it,  
so that they would not be put out of the synagogue;

- fear of man is a snare / trap.

[X]

Last week I at lecture of highly awarded university academic:

- Stuart Burgess** - Prof of Engineering Design at Bristol university in UK;
  - he makes no secret of His belief in creating / redeeming God of Bible;
  - many attempted to have him sacked;
  - V-Chancellor called him - not agree w him – but can’t afford to lose you;
    - you bring in too much money – so good at what you do;
      - good because copies God’s designs in engineering;
    - said he knows many scientists who recognise intelligent design in world
    - but dare not say it in today’s climate – fear lose their jobs;
  - fear of standing out / mocked / sacked – as real in today’s world as in John’s.

**Back to text** – gets worse: deeper reason why these leaders not confess Jesus – not only fear:

**(43)** for they **loved the glory that comes from man**

**more than** the glory that comes from God.

[X]

- most of us / perhaps all of us – been there before – might still be there;
- they preferred the acceptance / approval / approbation of ones they could see;
- over & above acceptance / approval / approbation of One can’t see;
- but His approval is only One : really matters in the end.

Another way to put it: they **seduced by a substitute glory**;

- glory that sounds good / looks good / feels good;
- but is not of God – so not good;
- seduces us away from God:
  - looking to other things / other people / other feelings;
  - promising pleasure / profit / satisfaction / success;
  - rob us of rightful place of God as Lord of every area of life.
- summarises so much of sin – so easy to be sucked in / seduced:
  - loving the glory that comes from man
  - more than the glory that comes from God.

These **authorities who believed in Him** - may have **looked like true believers** –

- but at end of section – we left w no assurance that they w God at all;
- all v sad.

So I'd say this text leaves us w something of a ...

## Conundrum

= a **confusing** / difficult description;

- Light comes into world;
- darkness hates the light / spurns / resents / rejects / seeks to exterminate Light;
- but in there God blinds eyes / hardens hearts – so will not be turn / saved;
- God had decreed / determined that some people will not be saved.

## This is a hard saying

When Jesus spoke to disciples re marriage – they said it was a **hard saying**;

– here's another **hard saying**:

So hard some people say: ***I can't believe in a God like that***;

- *this is a cold / cruel / coercive / Calvinistic God who I cannot / will not believe in;*
- *the God I want is one who leaves it up to everyone whether they believe or not.*
- *that's my type of God.*

But that is **exactly the issue** that John is addressing here in his gospel;

- people were saying : *I can't believe in a poor / pitiful / pathetic Messiah;*
  - *I can't / won't believe in him/ this is not Messiah I want to believe in;*
  - *I will have my own idea of Messiah;*
- v common attitude in Jesus' day – just as common today – just as wrong;
- we not given delegation to redefine God acc to our likes / dislikes.

A hard saying ...

## This is a common saying

Some might like to think this is just Calvin's concept;

- but here it is in gospel of **John**;

Might like to think John lost plot here – got this wires a bit crossed;

- might prefer to go to **Matthew**;

- but Matthew quotes exactly same passage from **Isa 6** about God blinding;

- so might go to **Mark** – but Mark quotes exactly same passage from **Isa 6**
- so might go to **Luke** – But Luke quotes exactly same passage from **Isa 6**
- so might go to **Paul** – find at end of **Acts** he quotes same passage from **Isa 6**;  
  - to make matter even worse – when he wrote his systematic treatise to **Romans**;
  - devotes 3 whole chapters (9-11) to expounding this blinding in **Isa 6**;
- this hard saying is one of most quoted / common sayings in all the Bible!

God has ordered His word : so that **no matter where you go** - you'll come across this;

- we might think it is some esoteric doctrine can be safely left on shelf;
- but God says – you need to get this – in every gospel – expounded in detail.

Common saying ...

## This is a necessary saying

If God is **not as sovereign** as Bible repeatedly says He is;

- then whether or not we repent / believe / saved / have eternal life  
  - is up to us;

⇒ huge problem for our pride / patting ourselves on back for believing.

But even worse: Bible says: left to selves **not a single one** of us will **ever make it**;

- none of us born innocent / let alone righteous
- Fall of whole human race means we too far gone:  
  - we cannot turn ourselves around;
  - we cannot open our own eyes to glory of God;
  - we cannot raise ourselves from spiritual death;
  - we cannot stop sinning;
  - we cannot / will not be saved – none of us.

This is a necessary saying – you can see why God had it in every gospel in Bible.

## This is a glorious saying

This is a revelation of the **radiant glory of God**;

- He decreed : He will reveal His saving / redeeming love / power / glory;
  - He will share eternal life – in eternal joy w people He had made;
  - He must allow us to fall / rebel – be lost ⇒ so we can know joy of rescue;
  - He accomplishes salvation – does it / executes / accomplishes from beginning to end;
  - He is author & finisher of our faith;
  - His prerogative to pass by / leave some in rebellious state they chosen for themselves;
- How else could we understand how amazing / undeserved is His awesome grace?
- if some are confirmed in their blindness by Light of His glory;
  - He not sinned against them – He given them what they wanted;
  - confirmed them in their own choice;

How could we understand glory of God's justice - if it never executed?

How could we understand glory of His grace w/o knowing what we delivered from?

This is only a part of God's glory

Why I **emphasised what John emphasised**;

- this is a necessary / glorious truth;
- but it is not the whole truth;
- **remember table**:
  - the light being rejected by many is only 1 side of summary of Jesus' ministry
  - other side is light being received by many;
  - topic for next week. [X]

## Embracing the paradox: God's sovereignty & our freedom

**Sovereignty of God – freedom of humanity** must be held side-by-side;

- revealed side-by-side in Bible;
- must not play one off against the other;
- must not diminish one for sake of exalting other;
- may not fully fathom precisely how work together;
  - Scripture declares it;
  - our conscience corroborates it;
  - our experience validates it ;
- but only God knows fully completely – only God can do it – God has done it;
- **only God is God!**

Pray

**Sing** All I have is Christ

**Benediction** Rev 7(12)

Amen!

Blessing & glory & wisdom & thanksgiving & honour & power & might  
be to our God forever and ever!

Amen.