John 12:37-43

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[0:00] Amen. Please take your copy of God's Word. Join me in John chapter 12. Our text for today is John chapter 12, verses 37 through 43.

! As you're getting there, I just want to make a brief comment about my gratefulness for verse-by-verse exposition as the normal habit of our church. And this was brought to the front of my thinking this week as I go and I look at commentaries.
Largely after I've done much of the work that I do in preparation for a sermon, I go back and I check and just make sure I'm not missing something entirely. And I've got some technical commentaries and I have some more layman commentaries, some that are actually just the notes of preaching.
And three of my commentaries entirely skipped this text, just jumped over it, decided not to preach it, I would assume, in the context of a church.
And I'm glad that we have to take up and deal with texts that can seem difficult. As we come to the closing portion of John chapter 12, we arrive at a significant transition in John's gospel.
[1:21] For 12 chapters, John has been presenting the public ministry of Jesus Christ, carefully arranging his account around the words and works of Jesus so that his readers might recognize him as the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God.

We have watched Jesus turn water into wine, heal the sick, feed the hungry, give sight to the blind, and raise Lazarus from the dead.
Each of these miracles has served a particular purpose, to reveal something of the divine identity and saving mission of Jesus. Yet, in spite of this extraordinary revelation, the overwhelming response of the people has been unbelief.
The one who came to give sight to the blind is rejected by those who insist they can see. The one who came to give life to the dead is rejected by those who are spiritually dead.
And the one who came to reveal the glory of God is rejected by those who love the glory of men. In our previous text last week, we saw Jesus say in verse 35, in the beginning of verse 36, The light is among you for a little while longer.
[2:42] Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.

And then, rather ominously, at the end of verse 36, John tells us that Jesus departed and hid himself from them. There's something so profoundly tragic about that sentence.
The light of the world has been shining in the midst of Israel, yet Israel has repeatedly refused to come to the light. And now, the light withdraws.
And this raises a difficult question. If Jesus really is the promised Messiah, why did so many of God's old covenant people refuse to believe in him?
Was something deficient in his ministry? Had God's promises failed? Had the unbelief of Israel somehow frustrated God's purposes?
[3:50] Had the unbelief of Israel. Just with those questions in mind that John writes the following verses. We pray for us, and then I'll read the text.

Father, we ask humbly that you would help us as we take up your word together this morning. We admit that we need your help. We need the Spirit to help us to rightly see Christ.
We want to believe the promises of the Scripture. We want to obey its commands, and we want to find our affection growing for you as its author. So we pray that you'll help us to this end, and we pray in Jesus' name.
Amen. John 12, beginning in verse 37. Though he, Jesus, had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.

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So that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
[4:57] Therefore they could not believe. For again, Isaiah says, 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. Note with me first the tragic nature of unbelief.
We can see this in verses 37 and 38. The Israelites' rejection of Jesus as the Christ was not due to a lack of sufficient evidence.
John wants this to be very clear. Though he had done so many signs before them. That's the implication there.
[6:04] He had done ample things. They still did not believe in him. John's statement is remarkable because of everything that has preceded it.

Jesus demonstrated his authority over creation, sickness, blindness, and death. His signs publicly revealed his identity. Nevertheless, many witnesses to these miracles refused to believe.
John does not suggest that they lacked sufficient evidence to recognize the significance of Jesus. Rather, he emphasizes their stubborn unbelief despite the extraordinary evidence already given.
The fundamental problem of unbelief is not merely intellectual ignorance. It's not that we just need to know more.
The fundamental problem is the moral and spiritual disposition of the sinful heart. John chapter 3, verse 19 and 20 explains that people love darkness rather than light because their works are evil.
[7:15] In John chapter 5, in verse 40, Jesus tells his opponents that they refuse to come to him that they may have life. Scripture describes our condition in terms of blindness, hostility, and spiritual death.

You see Romans 8, 7, and 8 in Ephesians 2, 1 through 3. Apart from the gracious work of God upon the human heart, this is who we are.
We are rebels, enemies, haters of God. But the Bible never lets mankind off the hook.
You cannot say, well, I was just born this way. We are fully culpable of our rejection of the good rule of a God.
Now, at this point, you may be tempted to think that John goes on to argue that the Israelites did not believe because of the prophecy of Isaiah 53 and verse 1.
[8:19] Here cited, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? This is an understandable temptation because of the words preceding his citation.

So that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. I suggest to you that the prophecy of Isaiah 53 was not the cause of their rejection.
That's how many people might read this initially. But rather, it's just the prediction of it. John is showing us that the rejection of Jesus was not an unexpected development in God's life.
God's redemptive plan. This morning's reading was Isaiah 52, verse 13, through 53, verse 1.
And I hope that you'll join me there to look at it again. You can see it in your bulletin or you can turn there in your Bible. I hope you'll note the significance of why we read it in this way.
[9:25] And recall that the chapter headings are added later to the text. They're not inspired. Here we see beginning of verse 3. Behold, my servant shall act wisely.

We understand this now to be the Lord Jesus Christ. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you.
His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. 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.
Then verse 1 of 53 cited in our text today. Who has believed when he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

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[10:27] Out of the arm of the Lord in verse 1 of Isaiah 53 pictures God's saving strength. But that strength would be displayed in a servant whom the people despised.

A servant who would be lifted up, we now know, on the cross. Chapter 52 and verse 13. Marred beyond recognition.
Verse 14. A servant who would become the saving and reigning king of the nations. You see, John is teaching that the unbelief of man cannot overthrow the purposes of God.
Because even the rejection of the Messiah was anticipated within God's plan of redemption of peoples. So, John is clear.
Unbelief is tragic. And its fault is in the one who rejects Jesus as the Christ. But this unbelief does not thwart God's plans.
[11:40] But he doesn't depart his contemplation of unbelief there. He continues. Note with me the second. The divine hand in unbelief.

He goes on. Therefore, they could not believe. For again, Isaiah said, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. Lest they see with their eyes and understand with their hearts and turn. And I would heal them. Look at the progression in the text. In verse 37, the people did not believe. In verse 39, they could not believe.
John presents both the willing rejection of Jesus and the divine judgment under which unbelief persists in a matter of a couple of verses.
We must not diminish either statement but hold them together. Together. They did not believe. They could not believe.
[12:46] This is the issue of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man set together right here. And I'm going to make sure. A few phrases apart.

Charles Spurgeon once said, and I'm picking up in the middle of a long quotation here. one, God has a chosen people and has given these people to Christ and these people must and shall come to Christ and so shall be saved two, so this is two statements one, two, every man who comes to Christ shall be saved and let me insert the opposite those who don't come to Christ will not be saved I continue, since he shall not be cast out and that implies that he shall be received and accepted these are two great truths let us carry them both with us and they will balance each other so again, my insertion that's the sovereignty of God and responsibility of man in salvation Spurgeon goes on I was once asked to reconcile these two statements and I answered no, I never reconcile friends there's no need to reconcile friends they work together somehow both things are true at the same time we call this a paradox they seem to contradict each other yet, they don't and we ought to accept it because it is what God's inspired inerrant authoritative word teaches in Romans 9 as Paul wrestles with the unbelief of Israel he's doing the same thing essentially that John's doing here why is it that they're not believing in the Christ there, Paul cites a number of Old Testament passages to make this case and then he anticipates a question says Romans 9 verse 19 you will say to me then this presentation of God as sovereign over salvation why does he still find fault for who can resist his will yes, Paul reconcile God's sovereignty with human responsibility lay it out for us help us to understand do you know how he answers?
he doesn't work it out for us he says instead but who are you oh man to answer back to God he's been citing the scripture citing the scripture citing the scripture who are you oh man to ask such a question will what is molded say to what's molded why have you made me like this my summary of what he's saying is sit down and be humble stop trying to explain away the parts of the Bible that you have difficulty with submit yourself to the creator as one who has been created you beloved are not the center of the universe God is have faith like a child even while you search out the mysteries of the gospel plumb its depths but do so with faith like a child
I commend to you the words of Richard Baxter this is in the kids coloring today in our bulletin sometimes these are the best quotes in the kids coloring sheet he once said study hard for the well is deep and our brains are shallow I commend those words to you but in the same breath I say do not think you will arrive while you remain in your feeble body to comprehend the majesty of God and the redemption of his people just take him at his word and live there was a time I'll admit to my shame that I felt proud that I had some measure of comprehension of the sovereignty of God just taking up the word and reading it at its face value many years ago I had the opportunity to go briefly and partner with a ministry in Atlanta that did gospel preaching to people who were living under bridges there mostly drug addicts homeless living under these bridges and had the chance to walk down busy busy busy streets and step over guardrails with a man named Richard and if you can

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picture Richard with me he was 6'5
I'm going to guess 3'80 he was a very very big man and we were casually talking about how he had come to faith in Christ because we were headed to the bridge that he used to live under just six months prior so he'd come out from under that bridge had received the gospel was being discipled I was going back now to share the gospel with others and I wasn't framing my questions in theological terms I was just asking him questions about how it was that he came to saving faith and he so simply stated how he would have never come to faith in Christ what a rebel he was to Jesus he fully owned his rejection of Jesus and then God's sovereign work and calling him out of that and saving his soul beautiful simple and I thought to myself that's the way this needs to be held as he's going now to step over a guardrail and go under a bridge to a rather dangerous place
[18:50] I was glad I was with 65380 Richard going under there and that he was in charge to be frank to share that good news with others he saw no contradiction in it whatsoever now God's judicial hardening is a righteous judgment upon human rebellion John quotes Isaiah 6 10 describing God blinding eyes and hardening hearts in Isaiah 6 at the beginning of that chapter the prophet sees the Lord enthroned in glory his robes filling the throne room he recognizes his sinfulness he receives cleansing and is commissioned to preach yet he is told that his ministry will be met with profound resistance and increasing hardness of heart that's the context of chapter 6 and verse 10

John recognizes this pattern reaching its climactic expression in the ministry of Jesus Christ Jesus Christ has come and he is preaching and it is being resisted judicial hardening should not be pictured as God making morally innocent people wicked against their wishes it is God's righteous judgment upon sinners already guilty in their rebellion giving them over to the God's judicial hardening is never unjust because God never judges a sinner who is morally innocent and that's what's going on at the beginning of this text that's what's happening here John is just trying to help us make sense of the rebellion why is it that and he shows us both the human responsibility in it and God's sovereign work now note with me finally the theme of glory in belief
Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him if you have been a Christ follower for very long you have likely joined me in the experience of having read a text through on several occasions and missing a key word or phrase something just leaps off the page to you in an additional reading I've read the gospel of John many times I've read through this chapter even in my preparation throughout our study of John's gospel and it seems as if verse 41 didn't even exist until this week how simple minded we can be just jump over these words Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him I love it when New Testament writers under the Spirit's inspiration bring clarity to Old Testament passages right it's good when the Bible gives commentary on the
Bible I think that contextually John is telling us that Isaiah in Isaiah 6 saw the exalted Christ I think that's what we can derive from this as he's speaking about Jesus right that that chapter 6 verse 1 Lord that Isaiah sees is Christ and then he wrote of Israel's unbelief when Isaiah wrote of unbelief he did not condemn God as unjust but rather he viewed him as glorious how could this be to consider that people would reject Jesus as the Christ and yet Isaiah saw his glory and spoke of him I think there are at least two answers to this question that find their beginning in the doctrine of God's simplicity which states that he is all that he is at all times it's a rather simple doctrine but it's hard to wrap your mind around
God is always God he's not fickle like us he doesn't put on one characteristic versus another sometimes I'm happy sometimes I'm sad is an obtuse example God is all that he is at all times so first God is glorified in the condemnation of sinners because he shows forth his justice in doing so we do not worship a God who will tolerate evil and he is glorious when he sets wrongs right we want a just God second as we saw at the end of Isaiah 52 God has a redemptive purpose for all peoples and Israel's broad rejection of Jesus as the Christ is part of that plan so we see God's mercy shown to every tribe nation and tongue if that thought is intriguing to you
[24:31] I would really encourage you to go to Romans chapter 9 and begin with Paul's logic at the beginning of 9 as he's wondering why is it why is it that my brethren are not responding to faith in Christ and he works that entire argument out through the end of chapter 11 and there he praises praises God for the mystery of his redemptive work Isaiah and Paul and John saw the glory of Christ and would have us do the very same so what are we to make of the rest of this section I said we should notice the theme of glory John goes on nevertheless he's referring to all of this unbelief many even of the authorities believed but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it so that

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they would not be put out of a synagogue for they love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God some authorities believed in Jesus in some sense yet they feared the consequences of identifying themselves with him exclusion from the synagogue could carry serious religious social and economic costs and this threat had already been issued the Pharisees had said you speak of this guy you believe in this guy you will be put out of the synagogue these men recognized something significant about

Jesus but feared the cost of saying so now I do think that we should withhold pronouncing a final spiritual judgment on every individual mentioned in John 12 and verse 42 for example Nicodemus we've talked about him in previous study shows a developing identification with Jesus as the Christ we saw him first in John chapter 3 and then chapter 7 we'll see him finally in John chapter 19 and I've said to you I think I think that Nicodemus ended up a Christ follower developed across some time however a faith that never progresses beyond private approval of Jesus because public allegiance would prove too costly gives us serious reason to examine whether someone truly treasures Christ

John identifies these underlying affections they feared the Pharisees because they loved human approval so there you have Isaiah and I think by implication John has seen the glory of Christ and therefore follow him want to glorify him and here you have in opposition to that people who say there's something unique about this man we recognize that he's doing miraculous things maybe we even think he is the Christ and yet they still fear the Pharisees and they want human approval the problem was not simply some insufficient courage it was a disordered love genuine faith increasingly values the glory of Christ above the approval of the world glory is a major theme of John 12 son of man is to be glorified verse 23 Jesus prays for the father's name to be glorified verse 28 and then we see in our text Isaiah sees Christ's glory in verse 41 and then the preference of the glory of men in these last verses those who should have recognized the Messiah's glory were occupied with preserving their own the Christian life is more than adopting correct religious convictions it is the transformation of our affections so that the glory of God becomes more precious than temporary applause or anything else for that matter so let me work to give us some application in closing what do we walk away with how do we think about this text first I want to say to the unsaved believe that

Jesus is the Christ the anointed one of God the one who comes to take away the sins of the world there is sufficient evidence do not identify with those Isaiah prophesied about the opportunity to turn from your sin is presented to you today adults old and young children you are guilty of your rebellion you will not be able to blame it on God in the day of judgment you are guilty of your unbelief God will not lay aside his wrath for your sin repent and believe turn from your sin and embrace Jesus if you do this by faith he will take away God's judgment because he already bore God's wrath for you and he will restore you to God to the saved do not be controlled by the fear of man we may keep silent about Christ to protect our reputations soften biblical convictions to escape criticism or avoid confronting sin to preserve a comfortable friendship pastors and church members alike can be tempted to measure faithfulness by the approval of others rather than obedience to God's word the fear of man becomes spiritually destructive when our desires to be accepted by others exceeds our desires to see the glory of Christ also to the saved let divine sovereignty comfort and enthrall you if it weren't for

[31:16] God's saving grace we would all all of us be cut off from the loving kindness of God and Paul wrote in Ephesians 2 but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus rest in the completed work of Jesus on your behalf and work to bring him glory in the way you parent in your work in the way you learn students in your service in the church in your love of your spouse and by sharing the gospel with your neighbor to the very ends of the earth let's pray together

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