

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Unbelief of the Crowd

John 12:35-50

February 5, 2006

Verses 35 – 36a

- In these two Verses, Jesus urges those around Him to “walk while you have the Light...believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”
 - As the “Light of the World” Jesus is certainly referring to Himself.
 - Let us learn two points from these words of Jesus:
 - **God is Sovereign; yet, man is responsible for responding to the Gospel.** Therefore, let us call men to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Jesus Christ is commanding them to believe in the Light.
 - **There is a strong sense of urgency in the words of Jesus.**
 - “*For a little while longer...While you have the Light, believe in the Light...*”
 - Jesus is referring to His approaching death, as He, the Light of the World, will be taken from the World. So, time is short to place their trust in Him.
 - However, the same truth applies to us today. No one knows when God will remove us from this earth; therefore, we must believe in the Light before it is too late.
 - ※ **May our evangelism reveal such a bold call for people to embrace the Gospel, while also stressing the urgency and brevity of time people have to respond.**
- Finally, this verse anticipates the words of Isaiah in Verse 40: “He has blinded their eyes...”

Verse 36b

- After speaking these words, Jesus, “went away and hid Himself from them.”
 - This phrase powerfully reveals the truthfulness of Jesus’ words – He will only be with us for a short period of time.
 - It is as though He is acting out a parable to demonstrate the reality of what He was saying.

Verse 37

- John then informs the reader of the truth that despite the many miracles Jesus had performed, “they were not believing in Him.”
- The Jews were no different than their forefathers who wandered in the wilderness, witnessing multiple signs and wonders, yet did not believe.
 - Deuteronomy 29:3-4 states, “the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.”
- Mighty acts and impressive performances will never be sufficient to save anyone.
- Regardless of the nature of any sign, there is nothing that we can do apart from the grace of God to save anyone. Remember, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead before their very eyes, and they still refused to believe.
- Faith comes by hearing, not seeing (Romans 10:17) – yet the world cannot understand this.
- We are to call others to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; however, we must recognize that even our faith is a gift of Almighty God (Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; Hebrews 12:2).
- Unless we are born again, we cannot see the kingdom of God; and we are born again by the grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God.
- There appears to be a point that John is making concerning the necessity of God’s grace for the salvation of men.

Verses 38 – 40

- Isaiah then quotes from two passages in the book of Isaiah: Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-10.
- In order to understand the intent of John (through the power of the Holy Spirit), one must view these two verses from Isaiah as being linked in some way.
- **The first verse is Isaiah 53:10:** “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?”
 - In its original context, this Verse opens one of the famous “Servant Songs” of Isaiah.

- Isaiah 53 speaks of the Servant of the Lord who was rejected by men and exalted by God.
 - Read **Isaiah 53**.
 - One of the interesting points of Isaiah 53:1 is that the prophet speaks of (1) human belief and (2) the sovereign work of God (“to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed”).
- John, then, states, “For this reason they could not believe...”
- Although the Jews, Pharisees, and Sadducees believed that they could spiritually see, they were truly blind (John 9:39-41).
 - What was the reason for this?
 - BECAUSE THE ARM OF THE LORD HAD NOT BEEN REVEALED TO THEM.
 - John Calvin wrote, “what makes men believe is...the revelation of God. The word *arm* (in Isaiah 53:1), it is well known, denotes *power*. The prophet declares that “the arm of God,” which is contained in the doctrine of the Gospel, lies hid until it is *revealed*, and at the same time testifies that all are not indiscriminately partakers of this *revelation*.”
 - The word for *cannot* in this passage comes from the Greek work *δυναμαι*, *dunamai*, meaning, “power or ability.”
 - In other words, “they did not have the power or ability to believe...”
 - This is perfectly consistent with John 3:3, “unless one is born again he *cannot* see the kingdom of God.” And John 6:44, “No one *can* (has the ability) come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...”
- **The second verse John quotes is Isaiah 6:9-10**
- These are words that were actually spoken by Jesus in other accounts.
 - Matthew 13:14-15
 - Mark 4:12
 - Luke 8:10
 - They were also used by the Apostle Paul.
 - Acts 28:26-27
 - In the original context, this follows Isaiah’s vision of the Lord “lofty and exalted.”

- Following the vision, the Lord commissions the prophet Isaiah to a ministry “destined” for “failure.”
- D.A. Carson writes, “God commands Isaiah to undertake this ministry in the full knowledge that the results will be negative; indeed, such preaching to these people *evoles* a negative response, is in some sense the *cause* of the negative response.”
- If we are truly preaching the Gospel today, it will, apart from grace of God, evoke a negative response.
- This, again, is the great paradox: The Bible is foolishness to those who are perishing, yet it is the imperishable seed, the very instrument of God that He has chosen to use to save His people.
- So, the passage John quotes from Isaiah essentially states that God has commanded the prophet to preach the Gospel as a means of “judicial hardening” of the Jews’ hearts.
- Yet, as the Apostle Paul views this truth, he sees that this is the means that God has chosen to send the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ to the nations.
 - Read **Acts 28:26-28**
- “Had the Jews accepted the gospel it is difficult to understand how it could have gone out to all the nations. But when the Jews rejected it, it became a world religion. We cannot think that all this took place apart.” Leon Morris

Verse 41

- John states, “These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and He spoke of Him.”
 - “These things” refers to the passages in Isaiah 6 and 53.
 - Because Isaiah 6 and 53 should be understood as relating to one another, the “glory” mentioned by John should also be viewed in light of both passages.
 - Many think that what John is saying here is that Isaiah saw Jesus, a *Christophany*, in Isaiah 6.
 - Although this certainly could be the case, it is not necessarily so.
 - John says that Isaiah saw His [Jesus] **glory**.
 - Even in the vivid vision that Isaiah received, the glimpse of the glory of God was veiled. As Isaiah looks up at the Lord (Adonai), he reports about the robe, and the smoke, not the actual appearance of the Lord.
 - “It is as though words break down when one attempts to depict God himself...When we press the elders of Israel, they tell us how blue the pavement under God’s feet was; when we press Isaiah, he tells us how

immense God's robe was...The experience is too personal, too awesome, to all-encompassing for mere reportage." John Oswalt

- Isaiah was so overwhelmed by the glory of the Lord [Adonai] that he realized anything other than death (for him) would have been merciful ["woe to me, I am ruined!"].
- Further, it is rather clear that John equates the Lord in Isaiah's vision (in Isaiah 6) with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.
- Therefore, the message John is sending is that even Isaiah, who lived about seven hundred (700) years before Christ, realized that the glory of the Suffering Servant of the Lord was inseparably linked to exaltation *through* His sacrificial death.
- "Isaiah foresaw that God was pleased with a suffering Servant who would be 'raised and lifted up and highly exalted' (52:13), yet who was 'pierced for our transgressions' and 'bore the sins of many' (53:5, 12). Hence, Isaiah knew that God's glory would be revealed through a suffering Messiah – something deemed impossible by the crowds (John 12:34)." Andreas Kostenberger
- Like Abraham (in John 8:56, 58), Isaiah saw the day of Christ Jesus and rejoiced.

Verses 42 – 43

- After speaking of the "judicial hardening" of the people, John tells of many "possible" suggestions: "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him..."
 - However, this was a superficial faith, for "because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."
 - Some of these Pharisees may have been Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.
 - John uses the phrase, "for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue..."
 - To be "put out of the synagogue" was equivalent to excommunication from the local synagogue.
 - It marked one of the severest forms of social, political and religious ostracism, especially for a person of influence, such as a member of the Sanhedrin.
 - However, it would later have much more severe implications with respect to [Roman] persecution.

"The church endured little persecution as long as it was looked upon by the authorities as a part of Judaism, which was considered a legal sect. But as soon as Christianity was distinguished from Judaism as a separate sect and might be classed as a secret society, it came under the ban of the Roman state, which would brook no rival for the allegiance of its subjects. It then became an illegal

religion and as such was considered a threat to the safety of the Roman state. The state was the highest good in a union of the state and religion. There could be no private religion...

Christians consistently refused to offer incense on the altars devoted to the genius of the Roman emperor, with whom the welfare of the state was inextricably mingled in the minds of the people during the imperial period from Caesar Augustus to Constantine. If one would sacrifice on these altars, he could then practice a second private religion. The Christians would make no such sacrifices, and consequently it was thought that they were disloyal. The Christians also held most of their meetings at night and in secret. To the Roman authority this could mean nothing else than the hatching of a conspiracy against the safety of the state.”

Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church, by Earle E. Cairns

- Yet, amidst this persecution, this was one of the many means that God used to spread the Gospel message. As Christians were “put out of the synagogue” they carried the Gospel message with them wherever they went.
- John summarizes the heart of those who “believed in” Jesus: “they loved the approval of men...”
 - This is nothing short of idolatry.

SUMMARY

Verses 44 – 50

- John now brings Jesus’ public ministry to a close by quoting the words of Jesus. There is nothing new here; however, it emphasizes several eternal truths revealed earlier in this Gospel:
 - To believe in Jesus Christ is to believe in the Father, and vice versa.
 - Jesus is the Light of the World; to reject Jesus is to remain in the darkness.
 - Jesus came to save the world.
 - Those who reject Jesus will be judged.
 - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is *functionally* subordinate to the Father, obeying His will perfectly and completely.
 - The commandment of the Father is eternal life. Therefore, to believe in the Son is to believe in the Father, is to have eternal life.

