

The Conclusion of Jesus' Public Ministry John 12:36b-50

It's a joy to recite some Christian creed together. Creeds are helpful in a number of ways, like teaching our children key truths of the faith. Luther said that he needed three things to teach his own children: (1) *the creed* for doctrine, (2) *the Ten Commandments* for ethics, and (3) the *Lord's Prayer* for communion with God.

One of the lines in the Apostle's creed is that Jesus shall come to **"judge the living and the dead."** Some older translations say, **"the quick and the dead," but that's not a statement about Jesus' speed, his ability to even catch quick sinners!** "Quick," as in living.

We see this idea of **judgment** pop up again at the end of **chapter 12.**

**This is the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry
and it ends on his word about judgment.**

- **That's significant.**
- **Jesus speaks of the judge, the last day, the basis for judgment, the authority of that judgment...**
- **Is it because he's cruel? No, it's because he's compassionate.**
- **History is not cyclical; it's going somewhere — every knee will bow before him.**
- **In great compassion, Jesus makes his appeal for everyone to repent and believe in him so that you won't here, "Depart me from" but "Welcome home, child."**

This idea of judgment is **not popular today.**

Perhaps **nothing is so offensive and intolerable to people is the idea of being judged.**

I was looking for a place to workout over Christmas, while in VA, and I came across the website for Planet Fitness. **"Welcome to Planet Fitness. This is a judgment free zone."** It's **their slogan.** (I know what they're saying and appreciate the appeal to draw people to the gym. I'm not throwing shade, just pointing out how judgment is always viewed negatively).

If you peruse the local bookstore and look at best sellers in the **Spirituality** category, and you will **not find books on judgment!** You will see books *like Chicken Soup for the [Mother's, Kid's Golfer's, Single's, Traveler's] Soul; Ten Steps to a Better you; The Power of Positive Thinking.* But not **Judgment Day for the Soul. Or Your Best Life Now, Followed By the Judgment to Come. The Power of Thinking about the Judgment to Come.**

Many think the idea of judgment **as primitive at best, and dangerous at worst.**

- **But here are a few things about Judgment we need to remember.**
- **The Christian idea of judgment is much more nuanced than most realize.**

So there are some things we need to remember when discussing it.

1. **The reality is, people are passing judgment all the time, even in a day in which everyone thinks it's wrong to do so! Your boss doesn't say, "I don't care about your**

performance. Do whatever. This is a no judgment zone.” And do you think people are not judging you based on your appearance? Of course they do.

Even more importantly, we need to remember...

2. **The world needs a Just Judge.** If you know anything about the **brokenness and injustice** in this world, then the idea of **Jesus having the last word is good news!**
 - Without judgment, there is no hope socially.
3. **We need a just judge not just to set all wrong things right, but because we would have no authoritative basis for what constitutes a truly meaningful life.**
 - If there's no judge, then what does it matter what you do?
 - What's the basis for saying one action is more meaningful than another if there's no judge on the bench.
 - We need a judgment if we want meaning.
 - If you have total liberation, you have total meaninglessness.
4. (Relevant to our text) We need a judgment (to fix social injustice and provide personal meaning) but **the problem** is this **we can't bear the judgment on our own.**
 - **But it is by believing in Jesus that we can escape this judgment to come, experience freedom from condemnation, and can live a life of meaning, looking ahead to the day in which he makes all things new.**
 - That's why **we need Jesus.**
 - **We can escape condemnation because Jesus took the place of sinners on the cross.**
 - **His hour would come,** and he would take the judgment that we deserve.
 - Now, for those in Christ, the thought of the final day does not terrify us; we actually view death as glory to come.
 - **We live between two judgments:** Christ took our judgment at the cross in the past, and we look forward to the day in which he will make all things new.
 - We live with hope and meaning now in light of what he has done.

John 12:36-50

Well, this passage is all about **believing** in Jesus for salvation – and the urgency of believing in light of judgment.

There are two main sections: **(1) John's Reflections on Unbelief (36-43), and (2) Jesus' Final Plea for Belief (44-50).**

- John reflects on Israel's unbelief by considering it in a Scriptural context.
- Jesus' final plea, his final sermon, which essentially summarizes themes already touched on, is actually more like an epilogue than a sermon, sort of matching the opening prologue, bringing this portion of John to a conclusion

The theme of **belief** is where we left off last week. (35-36).

- You see it running all the way through to the end of the chapter.

- **This is the conclusion of the Book of Signs.**
- It's like John wants everyone to stop and reflect.
- **What about you? Do you believe?**

#1: John's Reflections on Israel's Unbelief (12:36b-43)

We can organize his reflections in five parts.

A. Unbelievable Unbelief (36b-37)

36: Jesus "hid himself" after delivering his message to the crowd (v. 35-37).

This hiding is like an act of judicial warning.

- Jesus just said, **the light will not be here much longer**.
- It also triggers John's reflections on Israel rejecting the Messiah....

37: Despite the words/deeds of Jesus, they did not believe. (Jn 1:11) Unbelievable unbelief.

Not only would Israel reject Jesus, but **they would put him to death**.

Have you ever been rejected by someone who should have loved you?

- There is **deep** sorrow and **wounds** that come from that kind of experience.
- Jesus knows sorrow. He experienced rejection.
- John will quote Isaiah 53, which says much about the rejection that Jesus experienced.

Israel should have welcomed him joyfully, but there was widespread unbelief.

- **Meanwhile, the Gentiles would pour into the kingdom.**
- Paul teaches in **Romans 9-11** that despite Israel's rejection, God has not cast off the Jews.
- **This time of unbelief has led to the salvation of the Gentiles, along with a believing remnant of Jews.** (There is a future for many more Jews to be saved, cf, Rom 11).

But in this moment, the vast majority rejected the Messiah.

It is **important** to note that the passage **begins** with **human responsibility**.

- They "still did not believe in him."
- **Everything that is said next follows their choice of rejecting Jesus.**
- **Because they did not believe, there were consequences and implications.**
- I say this **because some read this passage to say that the Lord caused their unbelief.**
- But this passage begins here.
- Further, **the paragraphs around it emphasize personal responsibility.**

B. Isaiah and Israel's Rejection (38)

John uses Isaiah as a source of his understanding of unbelief, particularly Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6. .

Isaiah 53: **Israel's unbelief did not catch God by surprise!**

Isaiah actually predicted it, some 700 years before the birth of Christ.

53 Who has believed what he has heard from us? [words]

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? [deeds] {Answer: No one.}

- 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.

So this rejection in John 12 is a **fulfillment**.

It does not *lessen* the responsibility to believe.

- John has marveled that people still didn't believe despite seeing and hearing Jesus.
- **Nevertheless, it fulfills prophecy.**

Israel's rejection was not outside of God's control.

Through their rejection, God's plan would be accomplished:

- (1) **Jesus being crucified as a perfect atonement for sinners (Acts 2:23);** and
- (2) **The Gentiles being grafted in (Rom 11).**

Jesus did not die as a helpless victim at the hands of the Jews and Romans.

- He has already said, "No one takes my life, I lay it down by my own authority." (Jn 10:18)
- And **Isaiah remind us that it did not occur outside the sovereign control of God.**
- Jesus' death was a **sovereign death**.
- Jesus' death demonstrated **sovereign love**.

C. Isaiah and Judicial Hardening (39-40)

Now, Isaiah 6 is in view, the call of Isaiah.

Isaiah is called to preach, but God says no one will respond!

39: They could not believe. Again, we have to read these verses **in order**.

- Verse 37, they **would not** believe.
- Now, they **could not believe**, and then he quotes Isaiah... [**read v. 40**]
- **After their unbelief, God hardened their hearts.**
- First, they **would not** believe; **now they could not**.

It was a judicial hardening: A hardening in response to their unbelief.

It is like what we read in **Romans 1:18-32**.

- **Many suppress the truth and choose to worship idols instead of the living God. God "hands them over" or "gives them up" – a phrase repeated three times.**

- God says, “Okay, you get what you want.”
- God hands people over to their sin and its consequences; they are thus called to the gospel.

So catch John’s drift: **There is an affirmation of human responsibility (you must believe); but there is also a solemn warning to those who persist in unbelief.**

- The warning is **do not presume upon the grace of God.**
- **Do not trifle with the overtures of God’s love to you.**
- You should **not assume that you will believe in the future.**
- Do not play ridiculous games with the gospel. Eternity is at stake!
- Today, is the day of salvation.

We **could philosophize about God’s sovereignty for days, but we don’t have any control over God’s sovereignty, and we will never know the mind of the Lord.**

But human responsibility is something that should concern us (Boice).

And your responsibility is found here in v. 40: (1) see, (2) understand (3) turn (4) be healed. If God by his grace is drawing you to Christ, then believe in him!

- Do not reject him, and do not assume you will later decide to do so.

D. Isaiah and Jesus’ Glory (41)

John adds a remarkable sentence here.

- The NIV says, “**Jesus**” glory and that is probably the correct interpretation, but the text simply says, “his glory.”
- Based on the context, it seems that Isaiah saw “Jesus’ glory.”
- **He beheld something of the glory of Christ, the King who would descend to earth and be rejected by men, taking our place on the cross.**

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

- After this vision of the Lord, then Isaiah gets a **vision of his sinfulness.**
- The Lord graciously atones for his sin, and then Isaiah **gets a vision for mission.**
- It’s a pattern for all of us – if you aren’t on mission, **you haven’t seen the Lord’s glory nor comprehended the matchlessness of his grace.**

Regarding this vision of the Lord, he saw Jesus is lifted up; robbed; surrounded about seraphim; etc.

- Carson comments that **these two Isaiah passages** are not only connected by the theme of **unbelief**, but also with the theme of **being “lifted up.”**
- He says, “Thus, when the Evangelist says that Isaiah saw God’s glory, namely Jesus, *and spoke about him*, he may well be thinking of the Suffering Servant who was exalted.”
- **The same Jesus who would be crucified, is the same Jesus is the exalted King.**

Isaiah got a vision for that – **no wonder this prophet could endure hardship and opposition!**

- A few years ago in Miami, we were taking a break from our Acts 29 meeting, and Matt Chandler said to everyone who was about to hit the beach, “**Be careful. There are some things you can’t unsee.**”
- He was talking about immorality and such.
- **Isaiah could *not unsee this glory.***
- That’s what we need to see.
- **We need to be captivated by the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

E. Superficial Faith (42-43)

42a: Even though most in Israel did not believe, some apparently did – even “the authorities.”

42b: But here is the problem: **they would not confess Jesus publicly (cf, Luke 12:8-9) because they did not want to be excommunicated from the synagogue.**

- **They were not willing to pay the price to be a genuine follower of Jesus.**
- **Recall the blind man who came to faith in John 9** – he was cast out of the synagogue.
 - o He provided a picture of real disciple of Jesus.
- These private disciples are ashamed of the gospel.

Are you one of these individuals that is unwilling to identify with Christ in public? Do people even know you are a Christian? Do not be ashamed of the gospel!

43: They loved something more than Jesus, namely **human glory**.

- There is a striking contrast with Isaiah and these secret believers.
- **Isaiah was consumed with Jesus’ glory; they were consumed with earthly glory.**
- They are not to be commended nor followed.
- We are all glory lovers — the question is, are you beholding true glory.

#2: Jesus’ Final Plea to Believe (12:44-50)

“**And Jesus cried out...**” — Consider the passion of this plea....

He speaks of four subjects related to his person and work: (1) his relationship with the Father, (2) his identity as the light of the world, (3) the danger of unbelief, and (4) the divine authority of his teaching.

These themes have already been expounded in John, and now they serve as a summary, before launching into a brand new section in John (13-21).

A. His Relationship with the Father (44-45)

Jesus alludes to his deity here.

- He is the Divine Son of God.
- **John's Gospel opened with this belief** (Jn 1.1-18), and it has been stated many times between the opening and the end of John 12. (cf., Jn 8:58; 10:30).
- **John 14:9**, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
- And **1 John 2:23**, "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."
- **Piper: "If you don't have Jesus as your Savior, you don't have God as your Father."**
- That idea is **not** shared by the pluralists of our day. **"All religions are the same. We all have the same God. All roads are the same since all religions are made out the same pavement."** That is not the plain teaching of the Bible.
- But what you do with **Jesus** is the real question.

B. His Identity as the Light of the World (46)

We have read of this theme numerous times in the gospel, and we read of it one final time as Jesus' public ministry comes to a close (eg., 1:5; 8:12).

Light is perfect metaphor for the person and work of Jesus because...

- **Like light, Jesus causes a reaction.**
- **Like light, Jesus brings life.**
- **Like light as a symbolic for truth, purity, goodness; Jesus embodies these virtues.**
- **Like light, Jesus illuminates our path.**
- **Like light, Jesus provides safety.**
- **Like light, Jesus provides healing.**
- **Like light, Jesus brings joy.**

Notice here: The assumption is that **unbelievers are in the dark.**

- **By believing, you do not remain in darkness.**
- **Many think, "Faith is a leap into the dark."**
- **No! It is a leap out of the dark!**
- 1 Peter – "he called us out of darkness into his marvelous light."
- Now, as his people, we are not to be **covert disciples, but overt disciples.**
- We are to let our light shine.

C. The Coming Judgment (47-48)

Previously Jesus said, "Whoever keeps my word will never taste death" (Jn 8:52).

- **Here he says something similar: whoever does not keep his words (particularly believing in him), will face the judgment.**
- **We don't get to define what a follower of Jesus is; Jesus determines that.**

- He doesn't say, whoever said a prayer at age nine at camp; or whoever attends a church service.
- But whoever keeps his word.

47a: Judgment here is connected to the rejection of Jesus' words.

47b: He adds that his first coming was **not primarily** about judgment, but **salvation** (47b; Jn 3:17).

Even though from another perspective, **he has asserted himself as the final Judge.**

- "[The Father] has given all judgment to the Son" (5:22)
- "And he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man" (5:27)

47-48: He is not contradicting that idea of his role as judge.

- He is not saying, "There is a judgment but I won't be there."
- He is simply pointing out that it is **his words** will be the basis on which people are judged.
- On what basis will he judge the "living and the dead?"
- By this:
 - What did you do with his message?
 - What did you do with gospel?
 - What did you do with what you know?
- Morris, "In a very real sense, people judge themselves.... In the last day, the judgment will be that the word of salvation came to that person and that person rejected it."

There will be consequences for rejecting Christ's and his message.

- You cannot accept some of the teachings of Jesus and reject other statements, like his claims to be God's Son.
- You cannot separate the person of Jesus and the words of Jesus. (Mark 8:38).
- You will be judged based on what you have done with the message of the gospel.

D. The Divine Authority of His Teaching (49-50)

49: The reason Jesus' words are authoritative and the reason his words threaten unbelievers with judgment is that they are the words of the Father (Carson).

50: The final word in his sermon, concluding his public ministry is this: **His Father's word which he has commanded is not a harsh restriction, but "is eternal life."**

- Moses' said his words "were life." (Deut 32:47)
- Now the greater Moses is here – believe in his words to have life.
- You can believe and have life.
- You can reject his word and face the judgment.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* puts it well:

52. "What comfort is it to you that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead?"

“In all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await as judge from heaven the very same person who before has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake, and has removed all the curse from me. He will cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but He will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory.”

Is it a comfort that he will come to Judge the living and the dead?

- Only if you have have received him as your savior.

He came to save sinners like us, from the judgment to come, and bring us into his heavenly joy and glory.