

John 12.37-50 Sermon / COB / 11.09.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** What if your boss gave you an assignment, then told you he fully expected – even knew – that you would fail. In fact, he had set the whole thing up so you would fail? What if the task was to sell a product or convince people of something, and you knew ahead of time that nobody would buy it, that nobody would be convinced?
 - Anyone ever work as a door to door salesperson? I did one summer. That was tough. I made a couple of sales, but it was a lot of rejection, and that job – like phone solicitation – is designed to fail most of the time, right? You have to have a certain personality, impervious to rejection, to survive in that kind of work.
- † When God commissioned the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, he told them up front that he expected them to fail, that the people and the nation as a whole would not respond to their message, they would not heed the warnings, not accept the teachings, not follow these spiritual leaders into a good relationship with God that would save them. Imagine how these prophets felt about that? If you want to know for sure, read Jeremiah's book, he complains all the way through it!
- † Jesus came with the same expectation. He came to offer salvation, and when he left after thirty-something years and about three years of intensive ministry all over the country of Israel, speaking to thousands and thousands and thousands of people, there were only 120 faithful believers who obediently waited in the upper room.
 - Jesus came to offer the eternal kingdom of God to Israel, and they turned away in doubt instead of accepting in faith. As the Son of God, Jesus knew all this would happen. As the human Messiah, it must have broken his heart.
- † You can open your Bible to John 12.37. We have Bibles available to you, should you need one, over on the window sills.
 - Today we will finish chapter twelve of the gospel of John. There are some hard truths in this passage. We have a theological discussion today. I hope you will find this to be a half hour well spent, that the sermon was instructive, interesting, and inspirational. Let's pray and ask for God's help with that...

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- † We are at John 12.37. Let's remember our context: In v.36, Jesus was speaking to the crowds gathering to prepare for the Passover festival, but then Jesus departed and was hidden from them.

[Slide 2: 12.37-38] John 12.37-38 NET: Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them, they [the crowds] still refused to believe in him, so that the word of Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled. He [Isaiah] said, "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

- † Most of the Jewish people in Israel were not believing in Jesus, despite all his miracles. On what we now call Palm Sunday, they got caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment and declared Jesus to

be the Messiah and King, but they did not have true faith, they did not really believe he was the divine Son of God, nor that he was a Savior from their sin.

- † John quoted from Isaiah 53.1 and said this prophecy was being fulfilled by the people's unbelief.
 - In this prophecy, which continues from Isaiah 52.13 through Isaiah 53.12, God reveals that the Messiah would suffer greatly at the hands of men, yet pay the penalty for mankind's sin; and God reveals that this would astonish the other nations who would finally understand God's revelation of a Messiah-savior, while Israel's people – to whom the Messiah was long promised – would reject their Messiah even though God exalted him. John indicates here that Isaiah's "report" or "message" was the truth about Jesus.
 - The "arm of the Lord" was a Jewish idiom referring to God's acts of power. God had promised Israel through the prophecy of Isaiah that he would bring judgment to the world and restore Israel as his people through his mighty arm [40.10; 48.14; 51.5; 52.10]. Isaiah's message about Jesus included the teaching that Jesus would be the agent of God's mighty arm, to reconcile the people with God as a sacrificial offering for sin, but that the Jews would reject it, while the other nations would receive it. John says this prophecy is fulfilled in his day, by most of the Jews rejecting Jesus.
- † In other words, about 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah predicted that the people of Israel would reject their Messiah-savior.
 - Imagine how hard that was for Isaiah to bear. First he had to prophesy that the entire nation would be exiled and destroyed, because the Jews of his day also would not believe the message from God; then – in the middle of prophesying that God would restore the people and nation and bring the Messiah-savior, he learns from God that the people will reject that Messiah!
 - What agony this must have caused him! Perhaps he took solace in knowing that just as in dark times before there always was a remnant of the faithful among his people, so now going forward there would always be a remnant of believers among his people. And in the end, God will keep his promise to reconcile the Jews to himself through their Messiah, who will be their king in God's name.
 - God put into scripture – his inspired word – that his people would reject Christ. Of course, God knew from time eternal what would happen. But once he revealed it in scripture, it had to happen, to prove God's word true!

[Slide 3: 12.39-40] John 12.39-40: For this reason they could not believe, because again Isaiah said, "He [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, [' (God speaking now)]so that they would not see [or perceive] with their eyes and understand with their heart, and [thus] turn [or return] to me, and I [God] would heal them.[']"

- † This time John quoted from Isaiah 6.10. He was not saying what happened in Jesus' day *fulfilled* this as a prophecy, but that what happened in Isaiah's day *illustrates* what happened in Jesus' day.
 - God commissioned Isaiah to take a ministry in which he would be ignored, scorned, and rejected by the people to whom he was to speak. God was sending Isaiah to evoke a negative response in the people, thereby hardening their hearts.
 - In Isaiah's day, God's judgment was already decided based on the people deserving condemnation, but now he would allow them to display how much they deserved it. God

blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts so they would not perceive and understand the truth and then repent [return to God], which might provoke a merciful reaction by God.

- † Fast forward to after Jesus' day, at the end of Acts, when Paul was under house arrest, but he called the local Jewish religious leaders for a meeting. He explained the gospel and how Jesus was revealed in the Jewish scriptures which we call the Old Testament.
 - When they failed to agree with him, Paul thought in terms of Isaiah 53 and quoted from Isaiah 6, by saying that the Holy Spirit was correct in predicting through Isaiah that the Jews of Paul's generation would turn away from God's Messiah-savior, due to closed eyes and hardened hearts and thus would not receive God's spiritual healing.
 - Then in **Acts 28.28 NET** [Paul said]: **"Therefore be advised that this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles [the other nations in Isaiah]; they will listen!"**
- † **[Slide 4: 12.39-40]** Most Jews in Jesus' day already had turned away from God and away from honoring the Mosaic Covenant with God; they already lacked faith in God's revelation about the Messiah and the New Covenant that were prophesied to come; and thus they already deserved God's condemnation [i.e. they deserved from God a judgment of "guilty"].
 - When Jesus was here, he offered light, the revelation that could save them, and some Jews did respond in faith, and so they "turned," "returned," or "repented" to God. The Greek verb *συνέπεσθαι* in John and the Hebrew verb *שוב* in Isaiah both can mean each of those actions. These repentant people received spiritual healing from God in the form of salvation and true spiritual life in intimacy with him.
 - We talked last week about how repentance is simply turning back to God. You are on the wrong path, pursuing sin and walking away from God, and you repent by turning around, away from sin and back to walking with God. What we are discussing today is similar: you are on the wrong path – worshipping other gods, being self-reliant, or simply not believing the truth about Christ and his gospel – and you repent by turning away from that and back to God, accepting in faith the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - This repentance is different from repenting of individual sins, because it is about the big spiritual picture, you are repenting of lack of faith instead of individual sins; we should have a sermon on that sometime next year; but the concept of repentance is the same, you turn to God in faith.
 - If you are not sure about putting your faith in Christ, I hope you will talk with me about it! I will not try to pressure you into anything. I am a teacher by nature, not a sales person. I would like to explain clearly what we believe and why, so you can make an informed decision for yourself.
- † Sadly, most Jews in Jesus' day did not repent or believe, in part because God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, to provoke their rejection of the Messiah so their guilt would be crystal clear.
 - Those people deserved condemnation for their corrupted nature and sinful lives, and they rejected the gift of grace through the Messiah-savior in unbelief, which was both foreseen in scripture and then required to fulfill scripture.
 - Because faith in Christ and his salvation is the deciding point between who receives mercy and who does not, those who rejected Christ would remain condemned for their sin.

- † It seems harsh to say God hardened them and thus forced them into his condemnation, but remember we all deserve God's condemnation! We all have turned away from God at times, lacking faith and willfully disobeying him. We all have earned condemnation, because we all have turned away from him.
 - We call eternal condemnation "Hell": what is this, but eternal separation from God? These people already were separated from God by their own corruption and sins. They existed in a state of spiritual death here on a corrupted earth, where evil was prevalent but at least was constrained by the Holy Spirit and somewhat mitigated by God's people who did try to obey.
 - Hell will be the same people existing in the same spiritual death – separation from God – but now they will be alone, without the faithful around to help them and without the Holy Spirit constraining evil. They will have what they deserved and what they chose. So let's be clear that the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day already deserved this and had chosen it, even before God hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes to the truth about Jesus.
 - I don't know whether God is still hardening hearts today, but that is not the big question; neither is why God did not save these people; the question is why does God bother to save any of us? We too have deserved and chosen the path to condemnation and Hell! And thus we should be extremely grateful that God chose to open our eyes and soften our hearts, so that we could perceive and understand the truth about Jesus and thus respond by turning back to God in faith to be saved.
- † **[Slide 5: 12.37-40 summary]** Let me summarize this passage another way: vv.37-38 show the human condition: unfaithful, wayward, deserving of condemnation to eternal spiritual death; vv.39-40 show God's participation while Christ walked the Earth, but remember God was not blinding the eyes and hardening the hearts of innocent or faithful people, he was pushing the guilty and unfaithful farther into guilt and faithlessness. With Christ's presence, God was provoking them to make a clear decision on faith in God, his revelation, and his Messiah-savior.

[Slide 6: 12.41] John 12.41: Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ's glory, and spoke about him.

- † In the Greek text, it says "his glory," not "Christ's glory," but translators and interpreters agree that John is saying Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke about Christ.
 - We know Isaiah did speak prophetically about the Messiah-savior we call Christ. In this passage of John, we have seen Isaiah 53 – which clearly is about the Messiah – being fulfilled by the circumstances in Jesus' day; and we have seen Isaiah 6 used as an illustration of the circumstances in Jesus' day.
- † But what does John mean by saying Isaiah saw Christ? This is 700 years early, right? I would translate that Isaiah "perceived" Christ's glory, but that does not help us get at an answer. Here are a couple of theories.
 - One theory notes that in Isaiah 6, Isaiah had a vision of God on an elevated throne. Isaiah called him "Yahweh" [the name God gave himself], "Adonai" [which means lord or master], and "the king." If this was actually the Son of God whom Isaiah saw, rather than the Father, it would connect Jesus with Yahweh consistent with other teachings by John and Jesus in this gospel.

- It also would suggest that the Son, as the anointed judge of all people, was the one who hardened hearts and blinded eyes, perhaps as part of the judgment to come.
- A second theory is that John is saying Isaiah saw or perceived Jesus as the suffering servant he described in Isaiah 52-53. Perhaps this is a better theory, since Jesus said he was not judging people while he was here. Either way, God used Isaiah mightily to prophesy about Christ.

[Slide 7: 12.42-43] John 12.42-43: Nevertheless, even among the rulers [Jewish religious leaders] many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess Jesus to be the Christ, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. For they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

- † We do know that a few of the Jewish religious leaders actually came to saving faith, people like Nicodemus, who tried to protect Jesus in the Sanhedrin and who helped to anoint Jesus' body after his death. I am not sure that John is talking about these few here. He used a verb tense here that suggests he was being non-committal about whether this was true faith.
 - I think instead he is saying that even though they had hardened hearts and blinded eyes regarding Jesus as the Messiah-savior, some of the religious leaders even as high up as the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, did believe in Jesus as a prophet from God, but they could not extend that faith to believing in him as the Messiah-savior because they were intimidated by their peers and afraid of losing social acceptance from their peers.
 - In any case, there were some religious leaders of whom John was critical because they did not confess their faith in Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah-savior, due to this seeking after the honor of men instead of being willing to sacrifice that for honor from God, which is the same thing about which Jesus criticized them back in John 5.44.
 - The text here just says "they were not confessing," but we know from what we have learned so far, such as in John 9.22, that confessing Jesus as the Christ was the key issue that could get you thrown out of the synagogue in Jerusalem.
 - We need to take care that we do not fall into this same trap: we need to confess our faith in Jesus even when that will cost us, even when it will cost us socially, politically, in our career or our family, however or wherever.

[Slide 8: 12.44-46] John 12.44-46: But Jesus shouted out, "The one who believes in me does not believe in me, but in the one who sent me, and the one who sees me sees the one who sent me. I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness."

- † Now recall that Jesus had hidden himself from the crowds. He is talking with just his close followers. Yet he cried out or shouted out these words. Interesting.
- † Jesus said he had come [in v.46] in the sense that as the Son of God he left Heaven to come to earth. He came to be a light, a revelation from God the Father about how we could be saved from the condemnation we all have earned.
 - **[Slide 9: participle]** Here John uses the present participle verb for believing, emphasizing this faith is real, continual, and experiential. As we have seen again and again in this gospel, if we actively believe in Jesus, in this light, in this revelation, in this offer of salvation from what we

deserve, we will not remain in deception, not remain in spiritual death, not remain in spiritual darkness. Rather we who see the light and accept it in faith will become spiritually alive and connected to God right now.

- † Those who actively believe in Jesus as the Messiah [the Christ] believe not just in him, but in God the Father who sent him; to have faith in the Messiah whom God the Father had sent was to have faith in the Father himself.
 - Those who could see Jesus were seeing God the Father in the sense that Jesus was the perfect reflection of the Father's character and will. As the Son of God, he was in total unity with God the Father, and the perfect image of him. So to know or observe Jesus is to effectively know or observe God the Father. It is not just that Jesus is a faithful human agent, a true prophet, but that he is the divine Son in total unity with God the Father and so he is revelation of God the Father himself.
 - This draws on theology we have learned throughout our study of this gospel so far. We have learned that the eternal Son of God, part of the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, came to earth to be born as the human Messiah-savior named Jesus. The divine Son and the divine Father are totally unified in essence and in will, such that they are one God even though they are individual in personality and function. As the human Jesus, Christ was what we all were designed to be: the perfect image of God, the perfect reflection of God's character and agent of God's will.
 - Those of us who really believe in this Jesus and his salvation offer are born again by the Holy Spirit and have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, at work to sanctify us, to transform us in character, so that we too will grow to be like Christ, to become the reflection of God, the image of God, which we were created and saved to be.

[Slide 10: 12.47-48] John 12.47-48: [Jesus continued] "If anyone hears my words and does not obey them, I do not judge him. For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not accept my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him at the last day."

- † As we have learned before, the Greek verb for "judge," κρίνω, also can mean "condemn." It can mean I give you a judgment – innocent or guilty – or that I give you condemnation for being guilty.
 - Jesus said he would not condemn those around him who heard his teaching, his gospel offer, but did not respond in faith and obedience. As we have seen before in this gospel, the Son of God will be the judge of all people at the end of time, but he came to earth not so he could condemn people at that time, but so he could offer revelation [light], so that people could accept God's gift of grace in faith and thus receive salvation.
- † And yet, Jesus himself is the focal point of God's judgment: all of us deserve condemnation [a judgment of "guilty"] for our corruption in character and our sinful behavior, but those who come to believe in God's offer of a gift of a way out through Jesus will receive grace and mercy, while those who do not believe will remain condemned.
 - Earlier in this gospel, we heard Jesus tell his fellow Jews that if they would continue in his teaching – not just get excited by the miracles or exuberantly go with the moment to praise him, but actually follow his teaching in faith – then they would be his saved disciples, but at that time most rejected the idea [8.31, 52].

- The Jews in Israel during Jesus' ministry years had an opportunity to believe by seeing and hearing the truth directly from Jesus, so their rejection of Jesus, their rejection of the truth, validates that they deserved condemnation, and so it is this truth that condemns them.
- It is the same today. As we said earlier, we all deserve condemnation, to continue in spiritual death, separated from God, for all eternity. We walked away and we don't deserve a second chance. But God offers to forgive, he offers to save, he offers to deliver you, and you don't have to be worthy, you don't have to earn it, in fact you could never be worthy or earn it, so God offers this as a gift, and all you have to do to accept this gift is put your trust, your faith, in that promise of the Son of God coming to die for you being true.

[Slide 11: 12.49-50] John 12.49-50: [Jesus continued] **"For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me."**

- † Jesus spoke exactly what God the Father desired, and these words were the promise, the gospel, that would bring eternal life to those who believe. Here Jesus reiterates his unity with God the Father, his perfect revelation and representation of God the Father, and also that the truth he has shared is what we need to believe to be saved by God the Father.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 12: Title]** We deserve condemnation to that eternal separation from God and immersion in sin and evil that we call Hell. We each have chosen that by walking away from God, by sinning in the sense of doing or even thinking something that is against God's character and will.
 - But God offers to forgive, he offers to save, he offers to deliver you. As I said a moment ago, you don't have to be worthy, because you could never be worthy, and you don't have to earn it, because you never could earn it.
 - God offers this salvation as a gift, right now, just the way you are! He knows what muck still lurks in your heart, he knows with what you still struggle; in fact, he knows every sin you will commit the rest of your life, and with all that knowledge, he chooses to offer you salvation.
 - All you have to do to accept this gift is put your trust, put your faith, in that promise of the Son of God coming to earth as the human Messiah named Jesus, so as to die on the cross to save you. Can you believe it? Is today your day? Please pray about believing it and see if God doesn't inspire you with faith!
- † Those of us who do believe should be extremely grateful that God chose to open our eyes and soften our hearts, so that we could perceive and understand the truth about Jesus and thus respond in faith and be saved.
 - Now we need to take care that we confess our faith in Jesus even when that will cost us, even if it would cost us everything that is of this world.
 - And now we need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit who is indwelling us, to allow him to sanctify us and to do what he asks of us, so we experience transformation of character and grow to be like Christ, to become the image of God, which we were created and saved to be. Let me pray...