



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 12: 37-50

John

"The Calamity of Unbelief"

TRANSCRIPT

Here at Believers Chapel, we teach through the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. That's the way the ministry has been conducted at Believers Chapel. We teach through the Bible. Periodically though, as you teach through the Bible, you sometimes come to passages that you normally wouldn't choose to preach on. Your ministry was one in which you simply took random texts, the text that he was preaching on that morning, he would say, is not one that people would normally choose, and not one that is particularly popular to preach. And we come to one something like that in our study in the gospel of John. Our study brings us this morning to chapter 12 verses 37 through 50, and it's an interesting passage, an interesting passage for a number of reasons, but not one that I suspect many people would run to for text to preach on any given Sunday. But we come to it in our study. That's one reason it's very good to preach through the Bible consecutively. You're not allowed to pick and choose the texts you want to preach. You preach what God has for you to preach that day, and so in the course of that, you cover all of the doctrines of the Bible, the easy ones and the difficult ones, and we come to that place this morning.

Well, our text is John 12, and we begin with verse 37. The Lord has given a final invitation to the people to believe in Him. He has said in verse 36: "While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." Then we read that He went away and He hid Himself from them. Verse 37:

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them." These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but 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.

And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we come before You with grateful hearts. We come before You with thanksgiving and praise. We have in our possession Your Scriptures, and what a blessing that is to have Your revelation, which is given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And not only that, but we who believe in Your Son have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. He lives within us, the third person of the Godhead to give us understanding of the text, to teach us, and in so doing, to change us, to transform us into the image of Your Son, to build us up in the faith, to tear down that which needs to be torn down, and to build up that which needs to be built up to change us. Father, it's wonderful to know that You are at work doing that at this very moment, that You're always at work within us, always renewing us. But Your great means of

accomplishing that is through the reading and the study of Scripture. And so as we study together today, we pray that You would bless us in that study, open our minds and our hearts to understand the things that we have read, and the things that we will seek to understand. Guide us in our thinking, that we might know You better, know ourselves better, know our responsibilities better, and have a real desire and interest in living lives that please You. Father, You have placed us in this world that, as our text describes it, is a world in darkness. It's a world that's under judgment. It's a world that's filled with ignorance, a world that is characterized by spirit of evil and rebellion. This is where You've placed us to do work, to be like Your Son, to be lights, to reflect His lights. Not the light of our own. It's reflected light from Him, and I pray that we would do that, that we would be instructed from the text through the Spirit on how to do that, to be motivated to do that, and to go out from this place facing the week before us with a true desire to live for Jesus Christ and be His witness with a great concern for the lost and the dying around us. Give us that concern, Father. May we not be indifferent to the world in which we live. May we not turn our backs on it, that may we embrace it in an effort to bring the truth to lost and dying people.

We pray that if there be any such people in our midst this morning, that You'd bring them to a conviction of their sin and enable them to see their need of the Savior and see the Savior in Jesus Christ. Thank You, Lord, for sending Him, and for bringing us who believe to a saving knowledge of Your Son, and in Him, a knowledge of You.

Father, we pray for our material needs. We pray for those who are sick, those who are discouraged, those who face difficulties of one kind or another, that You would bless them, enable them to look to You, and to rest in the confidence and assurance that You give us as one who controls all things, and promises to bless us, even through the difficulties. We pray for those who are away, those who are traveling on business, whatever the reason for their travel may be. We pray that You give them safety and bring them home to us safely. We pray for our time together this evening. We pray You'd bless it. Bless the meeting of the church tonight as we remember our Lord, remember His death for us. Bless those who speak. Bless our entire service, that it would be honoring to You, and edifying to each of us. Bless us now as we sing our final hymn. May it prepare our hearts well for our study together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] This morning, we come in our study of the Gospel of John to a transition in the book. The Gospel of John divides generally into two parts: chapters 1 through 12 and chapters 13 through 21. The first part of the gospel recounts the Lord's public ministry. A second part before his arrest and crucifixion recounts His private ministry to His inner circle of disciples. The end of chapter 12, our passage, verses 37 through 50, is a transition between those two sections. And it has two purposes: to sum up the teaching of our Lord's public ministry, and to explain the response to that ministry by the Jewish people. It was a response of unbelief. The Lord's public ministry is now at an end. He has given His last sermon, and in that sermon, He has urged the people to come to the light while they have the light, in order to become sons of light.

Then He left them. John writes in verse 36, "He went away and hid Himself from them." Their response to His invitation, in fact, their response to His entire ministry is found in verse 37. In spite of what He had done, in spite of His convincing miracles, in spite of His persuasive teaching, John says, "they were not believing in Him."

How could that be? That was the question that troubled the early church a great deal, this matter of Jewish unbelief. We know that it concerned them because the apostles wrote extensively on it. The apostle Paul devoted three chapters to this subject of what happened to Israel in the Book of Romans, Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11. It troubled them greatly. There are many things down through the ages that have troubled the people of God, that have troubled the church. When the barbarians overran Rome in the fifth century, Christians, as well as pagans, were shocked and deeply disturbed. The world as they knew it seemed to be swept away. During the Reformation, the Protestants of Europe were stunned when their hero, Henry IV, Huguenot, converted to Catholicism in order to become the king of France saying, "Paris is worth a mass." They were shaken by that, wondering, "What happened?"

Today, we see something of that, I think. Plenty of people, religious and secular alike, are dismayed by current political developments and what seems to be moral apathy in the land. One political pundit, just last week, is predicting the end of our Judeo-Christian civilization, as he calls it. There are a number of examples of great disappointments and disturbances that shake up people and leave them

profoundly puzzled. This matter of Jewish unbelief was a profound problem, and deeply disturbed those in the early church, many of whom were Jewish Christians. How could it have happened? The Jews were God's special people. They were given great promises, and among those great promises, they were given the promise of the Messiah, their Savior. And for centuries, they had awaited His coming.

But when at last He came, they missed Him. Not because He was a secret Messiah, not because the things He had done had been done off in a corner somewhere. Not at all. In fact, John says that He performed so many signs, far more signs than John records. For us, he gives us seven miracles that the Lord did. At the end, he said He did many more than that. We could go through the gospels and read all of the different miracles, and we could conclude He did much more than this. Many miracles. Making the lame to walk, the blind to see, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, controlling the winds, commanding the demons. The list goes on. Many miracles and great miracles. And yet, John says, they were not believing in Him.

How could that be? With the preponderance of evidence, and such convincing evidence, how could it be that the Jewish people did not believe in their Messiah? Well, that fact of Jewish unbelief was a calamity that needed to be explained, and that is what John now does. His answer is, as surprising as it may be, and it certainly is surprising. That's the sense I think, of verse 37. He performed so many signs, yet they were not believing in Him. There's no excuse for that, is the sense of it. And yet, in spite of that, it was not unforeseen. In fact, it was part of God's plan.

John demonstrates that by first showing that Jewish unbelief was prophesied; and second, that it was punishment. In fact, Jewish disbelief was the actual means of bringing about worldwide salvation. Both of John's proofs are found in the Book of Isaiah in answer to the statement, "They were not believing in Him." John writes in verse 38, "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" Those are the first words Isaiah 53 which Isaiah began by calling attention to the unbelief of the people. Perhaps the unbelief of the world. Wherever one would look in the world, at large, there was unbelief. But that unbelief, strikingly, was within the people of God, within the nations of Israel and Judah.

And so, having called attention to that, he then recorded the prophecy of the suffering servant who, because of that unbelief, would be despised, afflicted, and

pierced through for our transgressions. John interprets that of Christ and his generation. No one believed the report about him. No one believed the message that he spoke. The revelation of God's arm, His strength, His miracles was not interpreted correctly. And so, Jesus was rejected. But it was no miscalculation, no mistake in His plan. It was all prophesied hundreds of years earlier. So, Jewish unbelief was, first of all, the fulfillment of prophecy. And secondly, the very means by which Jesus became the suffering servant, and the means by which He became our Savior. God overruled the designs of evil men to accomplish His good purpose of salvation. And John finds proof for that, proof that all of this was part of God's all-wise plan in another passage of Isaiah, which demonstrates that the origin of Israel's unbelief lay in God's action. They did not believe, and they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, He has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them. That quote is from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah has a vision of the Lord, and then is commissioned into His prophetic ministry.

In the commission of that ministry, the Lord warned Isaiah that the results of his preaching would be negative. People wouldn't respond. In fact, his ministry would actually produce resistance to the truth. That's a hard ministry to have. Often hard to keep people's attention as a preacher. We had a rather cold first service. People were complaining how cold it was. And one person said, "Well, at least people didn't fall asleep." And that's one of the problems we face. But here, Isaiah's giving a ministry where it's going to be to make them fall asleep. He is commanded to do that, in effect, that the text in Isaiah 6 reads: "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim." And in the Hebrew text, those verbs are in the imperative. They're commands. But when John quotes the passage here in our text, there's a change. It's not in the form of a command, but in the past tense. It is stated as a fact that has already occurred, and the suggestion would be: it's already been fulfilled. This, that Isaiah was commissioned to do, has found its fulfillment in our Lord's day. And what he says is, He, that is God, has blinded their eyes.

That's John's meaning. God's done this. What has happened with Israel is according to God's will. He caused it, but He did so as punishment on the people. This was a judicial hardening. This was a judicial blinding, and it happened as a consequence of the people's rejection of Christ. It was not done against their will.

We should not see in this God cursing a people who were morally neutral or blinding people who were good, that this blinding came upon a people who wished to believe but God would not let them believe. They were guilty of unbelief. That's the occasion for all of this, and that is the consequence of their unbelief. What has happened to them, this hardening, this blinding, was their own fault. They had resisted obvious truth, truth that was demonstrated with great power. And in so doing, they had rejected God's Son. They chose evil. God's action was just. It condemned them to do and to be what they themselves had chosen to be. And in that, we have a reminder of how important it is to respond in faith to the revelation that God gives.

This is no light matter. Picking up your Bible and reading it is no trivial thing. Sitting and listening to a sermon that is preached with a Word of God that's opened up is a serious matter, and it is to be taken seriously, and it is to be responded to with faith. Because unbelief has serious consequences. At the end of our chapter, Christ speaks of His word, of His message as God's commandment. And a commandment requires obedience. It's not something to be looked at indifferently, or to take a neutral posture toward. It is to be believed. It is to be obeyed. Israel chose not to do that, chose not to obey. And as a whole, the Jewish people chose to reject the revelation they were given, and reject the Son of God. And as a consequence, God hardened them in their unbelief.

It's very similar to what we see in Romans chapter 1 where Paul gives the results of Gentile unbelief. It goes back to the early years of Gentile history and how the Gentiles responded to the revelation that they were given. It's much more general than what the Jewish people had been given. The Jewish people have been given special revelation, the Word of God, but in consequence of rejecting His natural revelation, the Revelation of God in the world around us, and devoting themselves to idols, and worshipping the creature, rather than the creator. And Paul becomes rather detailed in his description worshipping four-footed beasts, and animals that crawl on the ground, and considering them to be god and worthy of worship. Because of that, we read, God gave them over in the lust of their heart to impurity. It doesn't mean he let them be turned over, He let them do this to themselves. No, it says very clearly: God gave them over. In fact, three times, Paul makes that point. God gave them over in the principle of divine judgment on unbelief.

Here, God judicially hardened, judicially blinded Israel so that they would not see and perceive and be converted. Tragic consequences. But all part of God's eternal plan. All part of His purpose of salvation because through Israel's unbelief, His Son was crucified, and atonement was made for sin. There's a great mystery in all of this. As you ponder it, questions are raised within your mind, and that's understandable.

But the ultimate cause of all things in a universe that is governed by God must be found in the will of God. God is God. If He is, and the Bible declares Him to be, we can only know who He is from what the Bible teaches, then He is an omniscient God, that is an all-knowing God. He is an omnipotent God, an all-powerful God. He knows the end from the beginning because He planned the end from the beginning, and He carries it all out. All of this must fall within the will of God and His purpose, His plans cannot be frustrated by evil men. In fact, the opposition, the resistance of men always ultimately works to the accomplishment of God's purposes. It did in this case because Israel rejected Christ. The offer of salvation has gone to the Gentiles. And throughout the whole world, because of the failure of the nation, the nations have been blessed. Israel's sin was inexcusable, and Israel was responsible for its response to the very clear and the very powerful revelation that God gave in Jesus Christ. But God used that rejection, used that unbelief to bring about His good purpose.

I think, as something of an aside, we can apply that principle generally to all of the things that are disappointing and discouraging in life that cause us to throw up our hands, and causes us to ask the question: why did this happen? What is going on? We may not know what's going on, but we do know this: God is in control, and it's working out according to His perfect plan. And that's cause for hope. Because if He were not sovereign, there would be no point in praying to Him for help, in seeking His blessing and asking for the conversion of lost souls. We would have no reason. There would be no purpose in appealing to Him because He would need help as much as we do. He's not in control if He's not sovereign. But since He is sovereign, we can look to Him with confidence, and we should look to Him with confidence.

Now, in verse 41, John makes an important interpretation of the vision that Isaiah had in Isaiah chapter 6 when he was commissioned to be a prophet and a preacher and to harden the hearts of the people. John writes that, "He saw His glory, and he spoke of Him." Meaning, he saw Christ's glory. It was one of the most

glorious of all the revelations of God in the Old Testament. Isaiah describes it for us. He writes that he was in the temple in the year of King Uzziah's death, which was a significant year, a significant time for Isaiah and for the people of God. It was a troubling time for them. Uzziah was one of Judah's greatest kings. He was a godly man. He led the nation well in a long reign. He made the nation strong and his death left a vacuum.

But it was then, when things were unsettled and the future seemed unsure that Isaiah was in the temple, and he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with seraphim above Him calling out holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The temple was filled with smoke, and the foundations of the temple trembled at the very voice of God. The meaning of the vision was clear. Uzziah was gone, but God was still on His throne. Nothing had really changed, and Isaiah need not fear. It was a vision intended to give him and give the people of God great confidence. And yet, we read, as John points out, that was a vision, that vision of the Lord of Hosts is a vision of Jesus Christ. He is that one who sat on the throne, the one who was born in Bethlehem, laid in a manger who grew up in a carpenter's shop in Nazareth, is the one whom Isaiah saw lofty, high, and exalted. He is Yahweh. He is God almighty, which reveals the greatness of Christ, and also the greatness of Israel's sin, because they rejected Him, whom Isaiah saw. They rejected the Lord of Hosts.

But again, none of this was outside of the will and control of God, the one who held the reins of power in Uzziah's time when Uzziah had died was in complete control through Israel's unbelief. And in all of that, He was working out His perfect will. And not all rejected Him. Not all rejected Christ. John tells of a number of Jewish rulers who had believed in Jesus. But they were weak believers at best. He writes that because of the Pharisees, they were not confessing Him for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue. That included men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Nicodemus, you'll remember, came to the Lord back in chapter 3 and came to Him under the cover of night. Didn't want to be seen associating with Him. Came sort of surreptitiously, secretly. And then Joseph of Arimathea is described later in chapter 19 as a disciple, but a secret one for fear of the Jews. Both were members of the Sanhedrin. Both were men of authority. Both were men who were leaders, but they were silent about their faith.

We find people like that in the Bible during the days of Elijah, which was a time of terrible apostasy. He thought he was the only faithful man left in Israel, and then God told him that no, there were 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. God always has His remnant. Things are rarely as bleak as they may seem. His work is always going on, and His work will always succeed. Still, the idea of a secret disciple is a bit troubling, and it is not condemned in Scripture, and John condemns it here in verse 43 with the statement, "they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

They wanted the approval of men so that they could get on in the world. And after all, that's how we get on in the world is by gaining people's approval. Want them to like us. That's how we advance. And so, for them to get on in the world, they had to stay within the synagogue. To be put out of the synagogue meant to be ostracized from society, meant to become a pariah within a Jewish culture. And so, they wanted desperately to stay within the synagogue. And so, to do that, they kept silent about their faith in Christ, which raises a question about the genuineness of their faith.

You read through the commentaries, and all the commentators deal with that issue. Are these men genuine believers? Well, the text doesn't answer that question. Doesn't tell us whether they were or they weren't. John does describe them with a phrase that is normally used of true believers. The best, though, that can be said about them is that they were weak in their faith. But it is true that people are sometimes held back from complete commitment to Christ, from genuine saving faith out of a love for the world, and the approval of men. They turn away from their spiritual opportunity. And in the end, they reject the gospel.

The story is told about a war long ago between two Indian rajas. One defeated the other and he took captive the son of his enemy. As he returned home, he prepared to march into the city in triumph with a great procession of his army, with its elephants, and its horses, and a long line of captives. The young prince was to be among them, and he was told that he was to walk barefooted and bareheaded. He was indignant at that. What would the people think of him? A prince walking in such indignity, walking in such humility. What kind of faces will they make? He asked. The raja said, "You haven't heard at all. You shall carry a bowl of milk in your hand. And if you should spill so much as one drop, you're going to lose your head." Well,

the bowl was brought to the prince, and two guards accompanied him in his procession. They walked for a mile, the prince holding the bowl of milk in his hand in what seemed like a walk that would never end. Finally, when they stood before the raja, he said to the prince, "What kind of faces did the people make?" And the prince looked up at him and said, "Your majesty, I did not see the faces of the people. I saw only my life, which I held in my hands, and I knew one false step would make me lose it." He realized that it would profit him nothing to gain the approving looks of men at the cost of his head. The wise person values his or her soul over the approval of men.

What does that matter? What do we really gain if people approve of what we do? Well, we gain some temporal advantage for a very brief time and it vanishes, and it counts for nothing for eternity. But God's approval is infinite, and it is eternal. It has value that is infinite and eternal. Eventually, Nicodemus and Joseph came out in the open and identified with Christ in His crucifixion. And following the resurrection and the day of Pentecost, Luke writes in the Book of Acts that many of the priests were believing in Jesus and making an open profession of faith.

Genuine faith will not remain silent. But so often, we who have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who have saving faith, we do stay quiet about our faith, and we do so very often for fear of men and love of their approval. That's a common problem. It's foolish. By being silent, Christians deprive themselves of the fullness of the Christian life. They deprive themselves of peace and joy. You think of John and Peter, after they have, in the early chapters of the Book of Acts, they preached the gospel, they're warned not to do it, they're apprehended, they're apprehended again, and then they're beaten, and they're sent off. The authorities think they've taught them a lesson, and they go off rejoicing that they'd been found worthy to suffer for the gospel. We remain silent. We lose that great privilege, that joy, that fullness of life, and we lose the great reward of being honored by the Father.

It's what our Lord spoke of earlier. Verse 26. Speaks of His servants, and He says, "If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." There'll be no honor for those who do not serve and stand out boldly. And a secret faith is simply not an option. Paul wrote in Romans 10 verse 9, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." True Christians are confessing Christians.

And how can we be silent with all that Christ has given us? How can we remain silent about that, and how can we not tell others all that He offers to sinners? That is recounted for us in the last verses of the chapter where we have a kind of resume of the Lord's teaching. It begins with Jesus making an appeal to men to believe in Him. This is not the Lord's last sermon. Verse 36 indicates that He has already given that. His teaching in these verses was given earlier. A time, a place is not given, but John includes it here because, as Jesus' public ministry comes to an end, these words sum up the main themes of His ministry and His teaching. He begins with Himself. He begins with Himself as the revelation of the Father. He cried out and said, "He who believes in Me does not believe in Me, but in Him who sent Me. He who sees me sees the one who sent Me." That's Jesus' declaration of His deity. His relationship with the Father, His relationship to the Father is so close that faith in Him is equal to faith in the Father. It is so close that to see Jesus Christ is to see the Father. They are distinct persons, but they are one in essence. I and the Father are one, He said. Distinct from one another, and yet united with one another. He is the revelation of God.

Now, we can study nature. We can search the heavens, and we can learn from the universe around us that there is a God, that there is a creator. And we can gain some sense of what kind of creator He is. After all, if He created all of this, then He must have power. We may even conclude from that that He has some wisdom, some skill. But we really can't know much more than that. We can't know the character of God. We can't conclude from nature that He is a good God. Some have tried to do that. But you can look at so many things in nature, earthquakes, plagues, and conclude: He's also an evil God. The revelation that we call natural revelation is insufficient to tell us the kind of God that we worship. To know the kind of God He is, He must speak to us. He must reveal Himself to us. He must give a special revelation, and He has done that in His Son. Jesus Christ answers the question: what is God like? He does that because of who He is, because of His deity, because He is God's son.

And John made this clear at the very beginning. Very outset of the gospel, when He wrote, "The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father. He has explained Him." Who was Jesus Christ? He's the only begotten God. He's God the Son, not God the Father, but He's God, and He has explained Him. As we

contemplate Christ, we learn about God's love. We learn about God's holiness. In Christ, we see the power and wisdom and faithfulness of God. We learn that through His teaching. We learn that through His miracles. We see that through His death, that He loved us that much. There we see, as we have seen in the past few weeks of our study, the glory of God. We see the glory of God in His love, His faithfulness there at the cross, that He loves so much, and He is so faithful. He is faithful unto death. That's the character of God. We see in that His wisdom, a wisdom of His plan of salvation, that there in the cross He demonstrated that He is both just and the justifier of the guilty. Christ is the revelation of God and invites people to know the Father by believing in Him. It was for that purpose that He came into the world. And so, in line with that, He says in verse 46, "I have come as Light so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness."

The world is in darkness. Not literal darkness, but a spiritual darkness, an environment of evil. That's the sense of that, an environment of sin and rebellion against God. There is a spirit of rebellion in this world. There is a spirit of ignorance in this world, the ignorance of God and the things of God. Jesus came to dispel the darkness and drive it away. This too is another familiar theme in John's gospel: light and darkness. The Lord spoke of that in His last sermon, but we see it all through the fourth gospel. Light and darkness. Twice, He declared Himself to be the light of the world. The first time was back in chapter 8. He was in the temple when a woman was abruptly brought to Him. She had been caught in the act of adultery, and He was asked to pass judgment on her. It was a ploy, a scheme by His enemies to trap Him, trap Him between violating the law of Moses, and violating the law of Rome. He knew what was going on. He knew the hearts of these men who had dragged the woman to Him, and so putting the burden on them, He said, "Let the one who is without sin be the first to cast a stone." Well, that convicted those men, and they realize they're just as sinful as that woman. Standing before who's perfect, they were ashamed, and we're told that one by one, beginning with the oldest, down to the youngest, they one by one left. The Lord then forgave the woman and released her with the words, "Go, and sin no more."

At that point, and this all happened early in the morning. At that point, perhaps just as the rays of dawn were beginning to fill the temple, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world." The light who reveals the darkness of men's souls, the one

who shines forth the love and grace of God in His forgiveness of sinners. He is the light of the world. That was the first time He said this. The second time was in the next chapter. He declared that He is the light of the world. In chapter 9, before He healed the man who was born blind. All of his life, that man had lived in darkness, never seen the sun. And Christ came and gave him sight. Not only physical sight, but gave him spiritual understanding when he believed in Jesus and worshipped Him. The religious authorities reacted to that. They rejected this man, rejected his testimony to Christ. They drove him out of the synagogue. So these authorities who are not confessing Christ knew what would happen. They saw it in that man who had been driven out of the synagogue. But in doing that, in driving this man out of the synagogue, those authorities, those religious leaders, those Pharisees show that they were the ones who were really blind, and they were the ones who were in the darkness. And because they did not believe in Christ, they remained in the darkness. Christ came to give light. He came to give life. He came to give the knowledge of God and salvation.

And that is what He said in verse 47. "I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world." But He adds, "Judgment will come to the person who does not believe." And He says, "The word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." At the last judgment.

Judgment is not a happy subject. I don't think it's one that's preached a lot in our day. But as you read through the New Testament, you can't escape the subject of judgment. And what's interesting is, as you read our Lord's statements in the gospels, you find that more than anyone else, He spoke about judgment. He spoke about Gehenna. He spoke about unquenchable fire. He spoke about the last day, and that day will come. Read about in Revelation chapter 20, verses 12 through 15 where we're told that the graves will be opened, the sea will give up its dead, and all mankind will appear before Christ on the throne of judgment, the great, white throne. Then, men will be judged according to God's standards, not their own standard, according to Christ's word. That's what our Lord says.

But what is His word? It's the gospel of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone. The message that we find throughout this fourth gospel. We see it very clearly stated in chapter 3 verse 16, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. The end of the chapter, chapter 3 and verse 36, "He who believes in the

Son has eternal life. But he who does not obey the Son will not see life but the wrath of God abides on him." Deliverance from that wrath, life that is eternal. Salvation is only in Christ. He said that plainly in chapter 14 and verse 16. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but through Me." And all who try to come to God by another way, by the way of good works, by the way of religion, by the way of ceremonies, by any other way than Christ will be judged and condemned by His word. There's only one way of salvation, and to reject that is to condemn oneself.

People don't think much of judgment in this day in which we live. They don't believe in it. It's an archaic idea. It's out of fashion, and people give little thought or time to it. But there was a time when men gave a great deal more thought to it. Thought a great deal about the judgment to come. Dante, for example, wrote his divine comedy, and he described hell with circles, or places of increasing punishment and pain. I don't know that his description was all that accurate, but it was a graphic description of hell. And over the entrance into hell, he put the words, "Abandon all hope, you who enter." That's a sobering thought, and that's a true thought, and one people would rather avoid, but people need to think about that fact.

If you've ever visited the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome, then you have seen the frescos of Michelangelo. They fill the ceiling, magnificent frescos, which he painted at an earlier time in his life. But there is another fresco, a painting that's at the very front of the chapel, over the altar. It's the last judgment. He painted it late in his life when he had much to reflect upon about his life. And there is one detail in it that indicates that he reflected deeply on that subject, that he gave more than artistic thought to it. Rather, he painted it with real personal concern. In the center of the painting stands Christ. His hand is raised in judgment, and all around Him are men and women, raised to face that judgment. And toward the bottom of the painting stands a figure holding in his hand a human skin in grim detail. But human skin, that has the worried face of Michelangelo. That indicates that he looked to that day with sobriety. He looked to that day with fear, which was wise, but it would also, it seems, suggest that he looked to that day without hope. There is a problem. Hearing about judgment is not enough. Believing in judgment is not enough. Knowing that those who enter in must abandon all hope and that no one is worthy to pass the judgment of God is important, but it's not enough. People need to know the way of escape.

That is what the Lord gives. He did not come to judge the world; He came to save the world. And the chapter ends on that great theme of salvation. Verse 50. "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." What He says is what the Father says. If you want to know the truth, if you want to know God's word, Christ has spoken it, and what He has spoken, the gospel that He has given is God's commandment. It is to be obeyed. It is not an option to anyone. It's not a trivial matter. It must be obeyed.

Well, how do we obey it? By faith. By believing in Jesus Christ as the Savior. By repenting of our sins, turning from our own works, and trusting in Christ alone and His work alone. It is something that one must do with urgency and not delay. It is His commandment. But what a blessing to obey that commandment. Those who do have life that is eternal.

So as we conclude, I ask the question: do you have life? Have you believed in Jesus Christ? In the first quotation from Isaiah, the prophet asked, "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Can you say, I believe that report? And you can do so by the grace of God. And if you are here and you have not yet believed that report, if you have not believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, believe. Trust in Him. The promise is that all who come to Him, He receives. All who believe in Him receive from God the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. May God help you to do that. Seek the grace of God and may all of us look to Him with a prayer for boldness in the faith. May we be men and women who do not love the approval of men, but love more than anything else the approval of God. Seek to be a clear and bold witness for Him in this world of darkness. Let's stand now for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We consider a sobering fact of history: the failure of Israel to receive its Messiah. We must confess that apart from Your grace, we'd be no different. We were born in our sins. We were born dead in our transgressions. All of that's true of us. Only by Your grace were our eyes open, was life given, and were we able to believe. We thank You for that. We thank You for sending Your Son. We thank You for the life that's in Him. We pray, Lord, that You'd make us bold in our testimony about Him.