

John 12:44–50

Introduction

The last thing John said about Jesus was this:

➤ John 12:36 — These things Jesus spoke, and He *went away* and *hid Himself* from them.

It's this “going away” and “hiding Himself” that seems to indicate the end of Jesus' public ministry. The next thing John does is summarize the overall response of the Jews to Jesus.

➤ John 12:37 — But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.

The imperfect, “*were not believing*,” points to a continuing, unchanging state – as though now the final verdict has come in. When John says, “though He had performed so many signs before them” (even though he has recorded only a few of Jesus' signs), he seems to be summing up the whole of Jesus' public ministry as something now in the past.

It's because we've reached the end of Jesus' public ministry with its seeming lack of “success” that John went on to explain *why* the Jews had not believed. This was “so that” the word of God might be fulfilled; it was “because” God Himself had hardened their hearts. God has purposed to work out His sovereign purposes *in* and *through* this unbelief. The unbelief of the Jews is to be seen *as that which opens the door to* the salvation of the Gentiles. And then, in turn, it's only *in* and *through* the revelation of God's glory to the Gentiles that the true hope of Israel will finally be fulfilled. The unbelief of the Jews wasn't just foreseen by God; it was even—mysteriously—decreed by God for His own holy and just and good purposes.

No sooner has John brought us to the *close* of Jesus' public ministry, and no sooner has he provided us with the *final* verdict concerning the Jews' unbelief, and no sooner has he explained why this unbelief was *necessary* according to God's sovereign plan, than he goes on to write this:

I. John 12:44–46 — *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.”

When did Jesus cry out with these words? What was the occasion? What were the circumstances? John doesn't give us any clues. Instead, rather suddenly—even abruptly—without any context at all, he simply says: “And Jesus cried out and said...” In light of the fact that Jesus' public ministry has apparently already come to its end, and in light of the total lack of any specific historical context for these words (compare with the rest of John's Gospel to this point), I think what John is doing is reaching back again, here at the end, and summarizing for us, now, the *message* of Jesus. After this, in chapter 13, we'll be with Jesus and His disciples alone in the “upper room,” and for the last nine chapters of John there will be no more “public

ministry” of Jesus. So when John says, “And Jesus cried out and said...,” He’s simply saying that the whole of Jesus’ public ministry consisted of this “**crying out**” and of this “**saying**...”

Why does John do this? Why does he add this summary of the message of Jesus here when it would have been so easy to end with the previous verses? Because the unbelief of the Jews is not to be the final word. Because the unbelief of the Jews is that which opens the door to the salvation of the Gentiles and because it’s *in* and *through* the revelation of God’s glory to the Gentiles that the true hope of Israel will finally be fulfilled.

The sovereignty of God in unbelief, far from leading us to resigning ourselves fatalistically to God’s “secret will,” should lead us all the more to proclaim the good news with earnestness and with joy and with hope. Jesus knew all along that God had decreed the unbelief of the Jews. So did Isaiah. Jesus knew, as did Isaiah (cf. Isa. 6:8-13), that God would even use His preaching of the Gospel itself to harden the hearts of His hearers. But did this stop Jesus (or Isaiah) from preaching? Did this turn His message into something insincere so that He was just “going through the motions”? It’s the opposite that’s true. It was precisely Jesus’ knowledge of the sovereignty of God over the unbelief of the Jews—it was His knowledge of the purposes that God was working out in and through the unbelief of the Jews (an unbelief decreed by God)—that “empowered” Jesus to proclaim the good news all the more with earnestness and with joy and with hope.

As John looks back, now, he sees that the whole of Jesus’ ministry can be characterized as a “crying out.” Why does he use this word for “crying out” (*krazo*)? Is the point only that Jesus was “shouting” (cf. NET; NLT) or talking loudly so that everyone could hear? There must be more to John’s use of this word than *just* the volume of Jesus’ voice. Commentators offer different suggestions. Does John say that Jesus “cried out” as a way of emphasizing that Jesus was publicly and openly testifying before all the people (Ridderbos)? Yes. But is that all? Is that even the main point? Jesus “cried out” first of all because of the *nature* of His *message* – because of its *authority* as that which He has heard from the Father and because of its *importance* as that which is the only way to eternal life. With such a message, how can He *not* “cry out”? But I believe we need to say even more than this.

In Mark 5, the demons “cried out,” begging and imploring Jesus not to torment them (Mk. 5:1-8). In Matthew 9, two blind men followed Jesus, “crying out” in desperation for mercy and for the recovery of their sight (Mat. 9:27-28; cf. 20:30-31). In Matthew 14, Peter cried out for Jesus to save him when he began to sink in the water (Mat. 14:30). In Matthew 15, the Canaanite woman kept “crying out,” asking Jesus to have mercy upon her demon possessed daughter (Mat. 15:22-23). In Mark 9, a desperate father responded to Jesus’ promise that all things are possible to him who believes by “crying out,” “I do believe; help my unbelief” (Mk. 9:20-24). In Acts 14, the apostles Barnabas and Paul “cried out” in order to stop the crowd from offering a sacrifice to them (Acts 14:12-15). In Revelation 6, the souls under the altar “cried out,” saying, “How long [O Lord] before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:9-10). In all of these examples, the people (and even the demons) “cry out” because of their urgent wish to be *heard*; even more to the point, because of their urgent wish that the one who hears should *respond* to their words. How can we not see that the same is true of Jesus? If Jesus “cried out” because of the authority and the importance of His message *in and of itself*, He also

“cried out” because it was His earnest desire that the people should hear and that they should believe (cf. Jn. 7:28-29, 37-38).

Jesus knew that God would even use His preaching of the Gospel itself to harden the hearts of His hearers. But did this stop Jesus from preaching? Did this turn His message into something insincere, so that He was only “going through the motions”? It’s the opposite that’s true. It was precisely Jesus’ knowledge of the sovereignty of God over the unbelief of the Jews—it was His knowledge of the purposes that God was working out in and through the unbelief of the Jews (an unbelief decreed by God)—that “empowered” Jesus to proclaim the good news all the more earnestly and sincerely with joy and hope. Even as Jesus “cried out” to a hardened and unbelieving people, there was a remnant that heard and responded and believed, and it was from this remnant that the Gospel would spread to all the nations of the earth (cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) so that “all Israel” might be saved (cf. Rom. 11:25-26). And so we, too, are called to earnestly “cry out” even to those whose hearts may be hardened because of our great desire that they should hear the truth and believe *and* because we know that even in unbelief God is sovereignly working out His plans for His glory and for the salvation of His people.

But there’s another side to this, and I think this is the main emphasis in our text this morning. Even as we read the Gospel of John, we’re meant to hear Jesus crying out to us, earnestly calling us to believe. This isn’t just a formal “going through the motions” for Jesus. This is no empty invitation. This is Jesus “*crying out*” to you and to me.

II. John 12:44b-46 — “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.”

Do you see the emphasis on *believing*?—Even after the reality of hearts hardened in unbelief in the previous verses?

When Jesus says, “He who believes in Me does not believe in Me,” He’s obviously not saying one thing and then contradicting Himself in the same breath. In the next breath Jesus says, “I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone *who believes in Me* will not remain in darkness.” When Jesus says that the one who believes in Him does *not* believe in Him, but in the One who sent Him, His meaning is this: It’s impossible to believe in Jesus *independently* of the Father who sent Him; the only way to truly believe in Jesus is to believe in Him *as* the one whom the Father has sent. We’ve seen this theme over and over again in John:

- John 6:38 — “I have come down from heaven, **not** to do my own will **but** the will of him who sent me.”
- John 7:16 (cf. 7:28) — “My teaching is **not** mine, **but** his who sent me.”
- John 8:15-16 — “**I judge no one**. Yet even if I do judge, **My judgment is true**, for it is **not** I *alone* who judge, **but** I and the Father who sent Me.”
- John 8:42 — “I came from God and I am here. I came **not** from Myself, **but** He sent Me.”
- John 5:30-31 — “I can do nothing on My own. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I seek **not** My own will **but** the will of Him who sent me. If I *alone* bear witness about Myself, My testimony is not true.”

Jesus “cries out” because He wants us to understand and know that to truly believe in Him is to believe in Him always *as* the *Son* whom the *Father* has sent. Therefore, to believe in Jesus as the Son whom the Father has sent *is* to believe in the Father—to truly see the Son who has come from the Father *is* to see the Father (cf. Jn. 14:1, 6).

Now “seeing” is only possible when there’s “light,” so Jesus says: “I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me [everyone who truly sees Me, the Light of the world] will not remain [will not go on living; *meno*] in darkness.” To truly see Jesus, therefore, is to see the “*light*” of God’s revelation of Himself in Jesus – the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us (cf. Jn. 1:14). If we cannot see Jesus, who *is* the *Light*, then we’re walking in the darkness – we’re walking without God and without hope in this world (cf. Eph. 2:12). But Jesus came as *Light* into this world so that we who have had our eyes opened to His glory and who have seen Him and believed in Him might not remain in darkness, but have the true “Light of life” (cf. 12:35-36).

- John 1:4–5 (cf. 1:7-9; 3:19-21) — In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness.
- John 8:12 — “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”
- John 9:5 — “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”
- John 12:35–36 — “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

Jesus “cries out” because He wants us to know that perfect joy of seeing the Light and walking in the Light.

- 2 Corinthians 4:6 — For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

In the midst of the “particularism” or the “exclusivism” of God’s electing purposes we have this wonderful “universalism” of Jesus’ words as He cries out to us all: “*He who believes in Me* [whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; cf. Gal. 3:28], 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 Jesus “cried out” because of the authority and the importance of His message *in and of itself*, He also “cried out” because it was His earnest desire that we should hear and that we should believe. So John goes on to recount what else Jesus “cried out” in verses 47-48:

III. John 12:47–48 — “If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge [condemn] him; for I did not come to judge [condemn] 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.”

In the last verses, we saw the *saving* universality of Jesus' words – words that reach out to encompass *any* and *all* and *everyone*. Now we see *also* that there is, by sheer necessity, a *fearful* universality to Jesus' words. On the one hand, Jesus "cried out" not because it was His desire that our hearts should be hardened, but only because it was His earnest desire that all who heard Him should believe. Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, but to save the world. And yet on the other hand, the very fact of Jesus' coming has brought along with it a more severe condemnation for *all* who hear His sayings, but don't keep them (cf. Rom. 2:12-16). To "keep," here, means to *believe*, and to *cherish*, and to *observe*, and to *guard* – to make Jesus' words the foundation upon which the "house" of one's *life* is built (cf. Mat. 7:24-27). It's what Paul refers to as the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. Acts 6:7; Rom. 15:18).

So what about *all* those who hear Jesus sayings—as every single one of us here have—but don't keep them? It is *not* Jesus who will condemn them; instead, it will be their own rejection of Jesus and the life that is built upon this rejection of Jesus that will condemn them. It is *not* Jesus who will condemn them, but rather their own failure to receive and to cherish, and to observe and to guard in the living of their lives the life-giving word of *Him* who *is* God's life-giving Word (Jesus said, "he who rejects *ME* and does not receive *My sayings*"). It is *not* Jesus who will condemn, but rather the *saving* word that He has spoken and that men and women *rejected*.

But now, *why* does Jesus "cry out" with these words, "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them..."? *Why* does Jesus warn of being condemned on the last day by one's *own* rejection of *Him* and of His *saving* word? Jesus "cries out" because even in this warning of condemnation He would call us all to believe and to be saved.

➤ John 3:17–19 — God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged *already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This *is* the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

We see, then, that there is no neutrality. We are either walking in the light or we are walking in the darkness. We are either believing and cherishing His word or we are rejecting His word. We are either partakers of His salvation or we are standing already under the condemnation at the last day.

And how is it, again, that a person's eternal destiny should be determined by his response to the word that *Jesus* spoke? Jesus continued to "*cry out*," saying:

IV. John 12:49–50 — "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 [the word that He has given Me to speak] is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

If Jesus had come and spoken on His own initiative, there would be no hope in listening to His words. But as it is, it's the Father Himself who gave Jesus a commandment as to what to say and what to speak! And the word that the Father commanded Jesus to speak to us is the message of

“eternal life” (cf. 1 Jn. 2:25), because the Father—who has life in Himself—has given to the Son also to have life in Himself (cf. Jn. 5:26). Therefore the things Jesus speaks, He speaks just as the Father has told Him! Can we ever comprehend the gift of the words that Jesus has spoken to us? Could there ever be a more certain foundation of our hope and confidence?

Why does Jesus “cry out” with these words? On the one, Jesus “cried out” because of the nature of His message – because of its authority as that which He has heard from the Father and because of its importance as that which is the only way to eternal life. But then we need to ask again: Why does Jesus “cry out” with these words? And the answer is, because He’s earnestly calling us to believe – and not just to believe at a particular decisive moment, but to be always *believing*, today, and tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, until the certainty of faith becomes the certainty of sight and we know Him fully just as we also have been fully known (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12).

- John 5:24 — “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”
- John 6:40 — “This is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Here in John chapter twelve—in these *words* with which Jesus has been “crying out” throughout all His public ministry—we have an anchor for our souls (cf. Heb. 6:13-20). Remember how in chapter six there were many who withdrew from Jesus and were not walking with Him anymore. Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” (Jn. 6:66-67) May all of us be able to answer this question not just with our words, but even with the very living of our lives every day: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You [only] have *words* of eternal life” (Jn. 6:68).