

June 7, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 12:44-50.

1. Why is important to believe Jesus?
2. In what ways did Jesus manifest God the Father?
3. What will be the standard of judgment in the last day and who will the Judge be?
4. What is the commandment that God the Father gave to God the Son?

BELIEVE AND BE SAVED
John 12:44-50

Some years ago, there was a man visiting a Sunday morning service here who believed with all his heart that he was the Holy Spirit. The man was supposed to be taking medication to help keep him balanced emotionally and mentally, but he chose not to take the medicine. As a result, he sincerely believed that he was the Holy Spirit. Because he was so convinced, he kept telling the man who brought him that he needed to come to the front of the auditorium to speak. I am very thankful that his host restrained him.

We naturally feel sympathy for a person who becomes so deluded. Everyone knows that to believe you are the Holy Spirit or Superman or Wonder Woman is terribly farfetched and puts the person out of touch with reality. But what about people who sincerely believe that there is a different god than the God who is described in

the Bible? What do we feel toward the person who is wholly convinced that he or she must do many good works and exercise austere discipline throughout life in order to go to heaven?

Some people sincerely believe in the God who reveals Himself in the Bible. Or at least that is their claim. But while they claim to trust the God of the Bible, they also believe that it is possible to atone for their sins by being nice, doing good things, and practicing important religious rituals. When I hear people make such confessions, I wonder who determines what constitutes “nice.” Who decides what a good work is? Who determines which religious rituals are sufficient to atone for the travesty of sin? The answer might be, “The church does.” Which church? Who has the authority to draw up a list of things that a sinner must do to appease God’s wrath for sin?

We do well to remember that horrible picture that Jesus painted near the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught that in the day of judgment many will say to Him, “*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?*” (Matthew 7:22). They will be the sinners who sincerely believed that their discipline and religious efforts would be sufficient to cover over the offense of their sins. Not so. Jesus warned, “*And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’*” (Matthew 7:23). That is a very scary picture if you imagine real people standing before Jesus and hearing His sentence for eternal punishment.

For a person to claim to “believe” is not sufficient at all for eternal life. The question is not if the sinner believes, but “What is the object of his or her belief?” What you believe is critical. As Jesus came to the end of His public ministry, He laid it all on the table. He clearly stated to very religious people who claimed to have faith in God that they needed to believe the right thing. What is that? Let’s see.

Believe Jesus (vv.44-46).

It is critical for us to believe Jesus because to believe in Jesus is to believe in God our Creator. John wrote that *Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me”* (v.44). We might conclude that this statement is the essential

message of Jesus' ministry. The essence of Jesus' ministry was to challenge people to believe.

John wrote that Jesus cried out. It gives us the idea that what He said was important. This is a raising of the voice in alarm or in order to arrest the people's attention. It is what the disciples did when they saw Jesus walking on the sea (Mt. 14:26). It is what Peter did to plead for help from Jesus when he began to sink (Mt. 14:30). It is what the two blind men did to get Jesus' attention (Mt. 20:30).

But the evidence of the four Gospel accounts indicates that Jesus seldom did this. We know that He cried out to the crowd at the Feast of Tabernacles inviting those who were thirsty to come to Him (John 7:37). We know that He cried out to awaken Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43). And He cried out when He finished the sacrifice for atonement for sins (Mat. 27:50). That pretty much sums up the times when Jesus raised His voice to call attention to the fact that what He was about to say or do was important.

So when did Jesus cry out this truth found in our text? We just read that Jesus had walked away and hid Himself from the people (v.36). That is an accurate picture of how Jesus closed out His public ministry. The rest of John's account about Jesus' ministry will deal with His final teaching and association with the disciples. Therefore, these words from John's record are like a summary of Jesus' teaching. No doubt at some point He had cried out and taught these things. But in a nut shell, Jesus had been teaching for three years that people needed to believe what He said because He was simply relating to them the message of their Creator God.

What Jesus cried out is critical because it is the call to believe God. Oh sure, everyone knows what it means to believe, right? Not necessarily. Genuine faith is a three-stranded cord. Faith requires *knowledge* of God and His truth. That is what Jesus had been revealing to the people for three years. But these were people who thought they knew God better than Jesus did. In our age, knowledge of God begins with His self-revelation in nature, characteristics of His nature revealed in His law written on our conscience, and ultimately in the written Word.

The second strand of the cord called faith requires *belief* in what God says. Belief is more than assent. There are many examples of people assenting to certain truth in John's gospel. There was the time

when 5,000 people believed Jesus so much they were ready to make Jesus king (John 6:14). But they didn't really believe in **Him** because His requirements for a personal relationship drove them away (John 6:25-69). It was not unusual to read, *Many of the people believed in Him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" (John 7:31)* And yet Jesus addressed the same people saying, *"But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" (John 8:45-46)*. Assenting to certain truths or traits about Jesus or God is not faith.

Third, faith requires *trust* in what God's Word says. Trust is complete dependence on the object of the trust. Trust is full reliance. Trust concludes that if the object of trust fails, we have no back-up plan. Okay, then what is the object of genuine faith? The object of our faith has to be all the words that Jesus, God the Son, spoke regarding God the Father, and His relationship with Him. This requires us to rest completely on who Jesus said He is, what He said He came to accomplish, and what He says about us. Full belief in Christ's words and person is the theme of John's writing.

Therefore, Jesus challenged the people to fully trust in the truth that to see Jesus is to see God our Creator. It is not easy for many people to grasp this reality by faith. And yet, Jesus was the perfect manifestation of God. The writer to the Hebrew Christians has given the most concise and thorough explanation. He wrote, *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:1-3a)*.

Jesus is the exact expression of God because He is co-equal with God the Father. Every single religion that denies Jesus' claim to equality with God does not believe and teaches false doctrine. Jesus was not just a good teacher, a worker of strange deeds, a religious icon, or a special prophet. You must believe that He is God who took on human form in order to save humans from the penalty of our offenses against God.

Therefore, it had to be that those who observed Jesus in His day saw God. That is what Jesus taught: *And whoever sees me sees him who sent me (v.45)*. That is what Jesus told Philip when he requested Jesus to show them God the Father. *“If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves” (John 14:7-11)*.

That is what Jesus kept telling the people and they understood what He said. *“I and the Father are one.” The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God” (John 10:30-33)*.

That is the reason the authorities used for killing Jesus. *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18)*.

To reject Jesus Christ’s claim that He is equal to God the Father is to conclude that He was self-deluded and that He was intentionally dishonest. Therefore, He was not a good man. A mere human who is deluded or dishonest cannot be the Messiah King who will restore Israel’s independent nationhood. He cannot be the Savior who is able to offer the required sacrifice to pay for sin’s penalty. He cannot be a unique prophet sent from God. None of these things can be true unless Jesus is who He declared Himself to be.

To believe Jesus is to receive Him. To receive Jesus is to receive light. Because He is God, Jesus had to be light. He said, *I have come into the world as light (v.46a)*. Since Jesus is God, He manifests God-like characteristics. One of God’s chief characteristics is that He is light. God is light in that He is the exact antithesis of sin

which is characterized by darkness. Sin hides and blurs truth like darkness hides and blurs real objects that are in our path.

Jesus came into the world of sin as light to dispel the darkness of deception and error. The religious leaders in His day were among the most deceived and errant people. They presumed that their man-made laws and traditions were pleasing to God. They presumed that they would be the first people to enter the kingdom of God. They fancied themselves to be the standard of righteousness that other people missed but should strive for.

Jesus the light uncovered important truths about the people who lived in the deluding darkness of sin—people like us. His light of truth revealed that the religious leaders were hypocrites who did not even follow their own rules. His light of truth exposed the man-made rules as foolish and unnecessary in obtaining righteousness. His light revealed that He alone is the way, the truth, and the life that opens the door to fellowship with our Creator. Throughout His ministry, the darkness of sin attempted to quench Jesus, the light of truth, but was unable to overcome Him and His truth. John promised at the beginning of this Gospel account that such would be the case. He wrote, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5)*.

Picture a dark room into which you have suddenly been thrust. You have two choices. You can sit in the darkness and try to grow accustomed to it. Maybe you will be able to dwell in that darkness long enough to conclude that this is normal. This is what everyone experiences. Or, you might grope along the walls of the room looking for a light switch so that you can dispel the ignorance of darkness. Suppose that in your searching your hands fall upon a switch. Now you have two choices again. You can flip the switch, which will make all the darkness disappear, or you can move along in your groping because you have concluded that dispelling the darkness could not be as simple as flipping a switch. In fact, you might be conditioned to believe that the switch probably doesn’t work anyway. You have flipped a couple switches in your day and neither seemed to work. Only faith will compel you to come into the light by turning on the switch. If you really believe the switch will send electricity to the light bulb, you will flip it on. And if you really believe that Jesus is the Light of the world, you will grasp Him by faith.

Trusting Jesus removes darkness. Jesus promised that *whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness (v.46b)*. Our natural condition is to remain in darkness. Like the person thrust into the dark room, we come to believe that unbelief regarding the Bible and Jesus and miracles and crucifixion and all that stuff is normal. We are taught that it might be okay to follow a religion of choice, but no thinking people believe the Bible!

The other day there was a group of politically conservative, thinking, policy-shaping people discussing current issues on Fox News. One of the group members expressed the acceptable norm in our day. The person was appalled to think that there were so-called thinking Americans who would be opposed to pre-marital sex. No one believes that kind of thing, do they? Actually, the light of the gospel defines abstinence as a characteristic of righteousness and pre-marital sex as a characteristic of spiritual darkness.

The only way to stop remaining in darkness is to believe in Jesus. We come out of our natural condition of spiritual darkness only when we lean wholly on the truth of Jesus' teaching and work. He said that He is God! Do you believe that? He said that unless our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the most religion people the world has known (the Pharisees), we will never get into heaven. Do you believe that? He said that He alone is the way, the truth, and the life that opens up fellowship with God our Creator. Do you believe that? He said that He alone is able to give us spiritual freedom. Do you believe that? He said that we have fellowship with God the Father only by being intimately connected through His blood. Do you believe that? That kind of belief thrusts us out of spiritual darkness into spiritual light. You can believe that Jesus is the Light.

Or Face Jesus as Judge (vv.47-48).

Jesus did not come to judge the world. Oh! That is good news! Jesus doesn't judge. According to the text Jesus said so. *If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him (v.47a)*. People hearing Jesus' words and not keeping them was pretty common. A lot of people were impressed with what Jesus said. But most of those "lot of people" rejected Jesus when what He said

became too costly. For the most part, the people were not interested in keeping Jesus' words but only wanted to benefit from His miracles.

Be that as it may, Jesus did not judge those who rejected Him on the spot. He did not judge them because there is more good news. Jesus came to save. Jesus went on to promise, *For I did not come to judge the world but to save the world*. This is the same thing Jesus taught Nicodemus. *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God"* (John 3:17-18). God the Son became one of us in order to provide salvation, not so He could judge us.

But wait! What about Isaiah's words that Jesus just rehearsed to the people before He hid Himself from them? Jesus quoted Isaiah's promise that the people would refuse to believe what Jesus taught (v.38). As a result, God judiciously hardened their hearts so that they would not be able to believe (v.40). Isaiah revealed that the glorious Judge whose glory he beheld was none other than Jesus before He became one of us (v.41). Is not judicial hardening of the heart the same as judgment, and isn't it Jesus who did it?

It is true that God the Father has assigned final judgment of sinners to God the Son. Jesus taught that He is responsible to serve as Judge. *"The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son"* (John 5:22). *"And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man"* (John 5:27). Jesus shares this responsibility with the Father. *"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 8:16). Therefore, His coming into this world will ultimately result in His judging unbelievers. *Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind"* (John 9:39). As we saw in the introduction of this sermon, Jesus drew the unforgettable picture of that final judgment. *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I*

declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23). That judgment is condemnation which comes at the end of the ages.

But sinners do not need to wait until the very end in order to know their condition before the Judge. Jesus' words reveal righteousness. People who reject Jesus are already judged. *The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge (v.48a)*. People who reject Christ and His words do not have to wait until the end to see what will be the outcome for them. They are already under condemnation. Jesus told the teacher in Israel, "*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God*" (John 3:18). If nothing changes, those folks will hear, "Depart from Me you who work lawlessness."

But, who says so? What is the standard of judgment? If a sinner is not aware of the standard of righteousness, how does he or she know that he or she has fallen short? Jesus' words judge. He said, *The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day (v.48b)*. It is true that the Bible is not popular in our day. To find out how unpopular the Bible is, try quoting the Bible in an argument for social justice and you will be mocked and dismissed out of hand. The Bible has lost its influence completely in the American culture. But the words of this book are still the standard of God's righteousness and these very words will condemn sinners in the end. Rejecting the words of Jesus is not a good choice!

Accept the Father's command and receive eternal life (vv.49-50).

God the Father gave God the Son the command to speak. This means that Jesus did not speak on His own authority. He said, *For I have not spoken on my own authority(v.49a)*. This is a repeated theme throughout John's gospel. Believe Him because he speaks with God the Father's authority. People witnessed God's authority as Jesus taught. He did not speak on His own, *but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment--what to say and what to speak (v.49b)*.

So what is that special, important command? It is about Jesus sacrificing His life for our sins. He taught regarding His life, "*No one*

takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (John 10:18). Therefore, God commands us to believe that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again so that we can have forgiveness from sin and be rescued from condemnation. That explains Paul's response to the jailer in Philippi. *Then he brought them [Paul, Silas] out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts16:30-31). The command to believe is clear and simple. And so John wrote later in his first letter: *And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us (1 John 3:23-24)*.

God the Father's commandment offers eternal life. In fact, God's command **is** eternal life. Jesus said, *And I know that his commandment is eternal life (v.50a)*. It is true that believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ gives eternal life. But that command is eternal life. It is the only means the only key to eternal life. Therefore, Jesus taught the command to eternal life. "*What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me*" (v.50). God the Son becoming one with us in order to keep the Law of God perfectly is God's plan. His crucifixion, the shedding of His blood to buy us out of the darkness of sin, is God's plan. His resurrection in victory over death so that He can offer us the same victory is God's plan. His interceding for us in heaven with His blood is God's plan. Therefore, this amazing story came from the Father and the Son completed it perfectly.

We must believe this. We must embrace this truth with all our heart. When we do truly believe, our changed lives will prove it.