

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Believe and Become

John 12:34-36a

Intro: We're still dealing with Jesus' response to a request for an audience from a group of certain Greeks. This prompts Jesus to declare that His hour had now come, the hour of His final sacrifice. He then proceeds to explain what this sacrifice will look like, what it will mean to His followers and what it will cost Him. Ultimately, His only desire is that His Father's name would be glorified by His sacrifice. The Father then responds audibly from heaven and the crowd around Jesus hears the sound but cannot discern what's being said; even though He assures them that the voice was for their benefit. Jesus then proceeds to declare that His death on the cross will be a judgment on this world's system (and its ruler) but it will also be the catalyst that will cause all kinds of people to be drawn to Christ.

Of course, with all this truth being disseminated by Jesus at one time, it's not surprising to discover that the people that were around Him were totally confused. I don't mean for that to sound negative, although it is. The reality is that most of the time truth is declared by Jesus, most of His audience was confused. In fact, very few of them really knew what was going on with Jesus, even at this late date in His earthly ministry. This is also not a slight on the people of that day because, truth be told, modern man is not much better. It's been some 2000+ years since Jesus walked the earth and a comprehensive written record of His life was compiled and delivered to us by eye-witnesses and still we have trouble discerning what Jesus has said. This is amazing considering all the scholarly work that has been put into deciphering the Gospels over the last 2 millennia. Let's see what the crowd's confusion is focused on here.

34- Despite all the press given to atheists and skeptics today, the existence of God is not a difficult concept for most people to accept. If the opinion polls are to be trusted, most people today claim to believe in some form of Supreme Being. The real difficulty some people have about God is in other areas; like the idea of God suffering. Many accept the existence of God as being probable but balk at the idea that He became a man in order to die for sinners. This is a concept so offensive and ridiculous to their sense of self worth that it borders on blasphemy. Now, this is not just a problem for

modern man; it was also a big problem in Jesus' day among His contemporaries.

I'm sure that most of these people had the same intellectual difficulties with the idea of a suffering Savior as people today do but, they also had another difficulty with this idea. This difficulty came from what they assumed to be the clear teaching of God's Word. At the beginning of this section of [ch12](#), Jesus had just prophesied His imminent death ([23](#)) and the manner in which it would occur ([32](#)). This is where the problem came in: with everything they had been taught from the Scriptures, how could anyone connect the Son of Man with suffering? The OT is full of passages that emphasized the triumph of the Messiah. In fact, there are several passages that speak of the perpetuity of His reign: [Isa 9:7](#); [Eze 37:25](#); [Dan 7:14](#). These and many other texts speak of the eternal and everlasting rule of the Son of Man. So how could the Son of Man suffer? How could He be "lifted up" on a cross of execution?

This theological dilemma is important for us to take note of; both in why it occurred and how it's resolved because it reflects similar theological conflicts that exist in our day. Why were these people so stymied at what Jesus has said?

The problem was that for as long as anyone could remember, they had only ever been taught the OT passages that spoke of the triumph of the Messiah. They were mostly ignorant of or at least blithely unaware of the passages that clearly spoke of the suffering of the Messiah: [Ps 22:1, 12-18](#); [Isa 53:4-5, 7-10a](#). With a teaching that emphasized the positive aspects of Messiah and ignored the negative, it's not hard to see how they concluded that Messiah cannot die because the Scriptures say that His throne, kingdom and reign will be eternal.

We can see how they came to this incorrect conclusion but the real question is why? Why were they only aware of 1 aspect of Messiah's ministry when the scriptures clearly present 2 distinctive sides of the same coin? The answer is: it was easier to believe the positive aspects and ignore the negative. Sure, most of the blame lies at the feet of the religious leaders and teachers of the law. The idea of a Messiah that would come and defeat all of Israel's enemies and restore her autonomous rule and establish His eternal kingdom...all of that sounds wonderful and prophecies that spoke of this were fairly easy to understand and deliver to the people. Of course, the

people had some blame as well. They loved to hear these kind of sermons. It gave them hope amidst a miserable existence.

The only problem was – when their long awaited Messiah arrived, they were in no frame of mind to receive Him! They had their mind so far down the road of biblical prophecy that they were not prepared to receive, let alone accept, their Messiah when He did arrive. This is not to say that everyone in Israel was so far out in left field. Nested within the story of Christ's birth is clear evidence that there were individuals that were faithfully expecting the arrival of the true Messiah. In [Luke 2](#) we have the testimony of Simeon concerning the infant Jesus ([29-35](#)) as well as the response of Anna the prophetess ([38](#)). Even the gentile Magi were vaguely aware of Who Jesus was, Where is He who is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him. ([Mt 2:2](#)). How could a few people be clear on who Jesus is while so many others were so confused? The reason is that the few were willing to consider the whole council of God on the matter, not just the parts they wanted to teach or hear.

This theological confusion is applicable for our day as well. So many people get caught up in one aspect or subject of Scripture that they fail to consider all that the Bible has to say on the matter. Take the issue of Calvinism verses Arminianism, or rather “predestination” vs. “free will.” Each side in this age old conflict finds Scriptures that establish their stubbornly held doctrines while failing to recognize that the other side has equally valid scriptures for their own!

What's the solution? There isn't a solution! The truth is the Bible teaches both predestination and the free will of man to choose salvation. The problem is man's inability to recognize that these 2 doctrines exist side by side in the Bible. The only place they are in conflict is in the hearts and minds of theologians. There are so many other areas where this willful blindness occurs – too many to mention here. [II Tim 3:16](#) is the rule in all areas of dispute.

Ultimately, their confusion prompted them to ask the question: Who is this Son of Man? This is an important question, even more so when we recognize that this is about the only title Jesus ever used of Himself! He has other titles, of course: Lamb of God, King of Israel, Messiah, the Beloved, the Word, the Son of God and many others. But Jesus didn't use these titles of Himself; they were given to Him by others. By his own designation, He

was always the Son of Man. This title is used 69 times in the first 3 Gospels and 12 times in the Book of John. Also, this title is particularly “inclusive” as it embraces the total person and work of Jesus as no other title does. To study this term is to discover what Jesus thought about his own ministry – including why he was to die.

The phrase “Son of Man” is actually a Hebrew idiom (figure of speech) in which the word Son (bar) is figurative while the word that follows it designates the classification to which the “Son” belongs. For instance, for liar the idiom is son of a lie or son of the lie. Sinners are sons of sin. A wealthy man is a son of wealth, etc. Our term, bar-nasha or ben-ish; points to one who belongs to the human classification. It just means man. This is important, for it speaks of both the great humility of Christ and the joy He found in being made one with His brethren. Sure, He’s much more than a man; He’s God. He could’ve called Himself God. But instead, the great 2nd Person of the Godhead, the Christ who became flesh, rejoices to be called exactly what He became: a man. In a way, it’s His boast; because He knew that in stooping down and becoming like us, He could now open the way for us to raised up to become like Him.

If we stop here in our study of the phrase “Son of Man” then we’ll miss the main point. It’s true that the Hebrew idiom simply means “man” but it’s also true that the phrase had come to mean so much more when Jesus arrived on the scene. From its unique OT occurrence in Daniel 7 combined with everything thing written about it during the 400 years between the OT and NT, the phrase came to be one term given for the anticipated Messiah. Linguistically, it meant “man” but to the Jews it came to mean “The Man,” that archetypal Man who exists eternally with God and who will appear at the end of time to consummate God’s plan of salvation. In light of this, there must have been a wide variety of opinions concerning the Son of Man in that day. If that’s true, can we fault the crowd for being confused?

Yes! Not only did they have the clear teaching of the OT, they also had the clear teaching of Jesus Himself! Jesus used this phrase to teach that He was preexistent. This is the clear intent of His first use of it in John’s Gospel (3:13)

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” No regular Joe can say what heaven is like because no man’s ever been there. But Jesus can because He came

from heaven. His life did not begin on this earth. This and other verses (6:62) teach the preexistence of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, His use of the phrase taught that the Son of Man was going to suffer humiliation and death (3:14-15; 8:28; 12:23). None of his listeners would've thought suffering was to be a part of the Son of Man's ministry. That's why when Jesus spoke of suffering, they were always confused. They looked for glory and power when the Son of Man would come. Jesus taught that glory was to come by suffering, and power was to come by way of the cross.

Lastly, Jesus taught that the salvation the Son of Man would bring wouldn't be abstract or general, but personal! It was to be applied individually (6:53-54). We've already seen that eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood is the same as "coming" to Christ or "believing" on Him.

All of these teachings (and more) had been faithfully and regularly delivered by Jesus prior to this question. We may understand the reason for their confusion but we should never accept this as an excuse for confusion. There are ambiguous and confusing passages all through the Bible, but when it comes down to the core doctrines, that handful of truths that determine where you spend eternity, the Bible is always plain, direct and very, very clear. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23) "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 6:23) "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:7) "The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9).

How do apply these truths to yourself? By coming to Jesus as your Savior! Thank Him for coming and dying for you then trust Him and follow Him. If you're already a believer, allow Jesus to be all He desires to be to you, in you and through you. That is His desire for you and that was His clear teaching for His audience in our text.

35-36a- I must point out that, in John's Gospel at least, these are the last public statements recorded from Jesus. Everything after this was said privately to His disciples or other individuals. So, these are His famous last words. Note here that Jesus doesn't directly answer their question. They wanted to discuss expectations of the Messiah but Jesus turns to a

completely different theme! Jesus begins to talk about the relationship of an individual with Himself. “Darkness is coming,” He says, “so seize the light while you have it.” These words apply for our time too. A time where the darkness is even more evident and where the light often shines too faintly.

Here, Jesus provides them with an important reminder: He is the light of the world. 4 of the 5 occurrences of “light” is preceded by the definite article – the light; a clear reference to Jesus. This is a rich image that identifies Jesus with the Father. This image teaches us that Jesus makes God known. Without illumination, humanity is in mental and spiritual darkness. They don’t know God. Jesus comes and His light shines on men. Now those who were in darkness have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It also teaches that Jesus is opposed to darkness. He’s opposed to ignorance, sin and evil and is determined to destroy them. How does He do this? He does it by shining! He overcomes ignorance and evil simply by shining the truth into our hearts and then by drawing us to Him. It also teaches that Jesus is the true (genuine) light; meaning He is the sole source of full illumination by which we can learn the truth about God and about ourselves. What if the people reject Him? He’s still the Light! What if they kill Him? He’s still the Light! He’s still the Light in our day too!

Jesus also gives the people a challenge that has 2 parts: Walk in the light (35) and believe in the light (36a). In the biblical sense; believing on someone means to take that individual at his or her word and then act upon it. Here, it means to take Jesus at His word when He declares Himself to be the Son of God and our Savior and then to act on that conviction by trusting Him as Savior and following Him as Lord. Is Jesus God? Then He must be our God and we must worship Him as God. Is Jesus the Savior? Then He must be our Savior.

The 2nd part of the challenge is to walk in Christ’s light. This is a step beyond just believing and where most people miss out. To walk involves continuing activity or progress. A proper response to Jesus involves much more than merely committing oneself to a set of truths and acting upon them once. It involves committing yourself to Jesus and following Him continuously. It means walking in His steps. It means doing what He does, thinking as He thinks, acting as He acts. That is walking in the light, for He is

the Light. To refuse to follow Him is to fall back into darkness.

That brings us to the warning. Jesus teaches that if we don't follow Him, not only do we remain in darkness, but the darkness we find ourselves in actually intensifies. We saw this played out in the story of the man born blind. Jesus healed him and not only did he receive physical sight but he also received spiritual sight and he accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Pharisees did the exact opposite. They had physical sight but lacked spiritual sight and so, they came to hate the Light even more, drawing them into a progressively greater darkness. Our options are simply to go from faith to greater faith or from unbelief to greater unbelief. We can move into more light or more darkness. It all depends on our relationship to Him who is the only genuine light of this world.

Finally, and significantly, Jesus closes His last public statement with a glorious promise. If we believe and walk in the Light, we will become sons and daughters of light. This doesn't mean we will become lights of our own accord but our lives will be characterized and classified by the light of Jesus Christ. True, the darkness is coming. But though it comes, the one who believes on Jesus will, by that very belief, become a child of light and reflect the radiance of his Master to the darkening world. By reflecting Jesus, we become a source of illumination to guide others to Jesus!

Which part of this final public teaching is for you? Did you need the reminder that Jesus is the Light of the world? Have you accepted His challenge to believe and walk in the Light? Maybe you needed to hear His warning of the coming darkness? His primary meaning was that He (the Light) would soon be gone; but the darkness is growing around us and eventually, each person must go through the valley of the shadow of death. Will death merely be a shadow for you or will it lead to greater darkness? No matter whom you are or where you are in life, the promise that Jesus offers here is still valid and still effective. Won't you make it effective in your life today? 😊