

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

Judge of the Whole Earth

John 12:42-50

Intro: We are discussing the summary comments of the Apostle John with which he concludes this section of his Gospel. John wraps up the Lord's public ministry by relating one of His final sermons to Israel (35-36a) but then he tidies up a few loose ends that concern the spiritual state of Israel at this time and a summary of Jesus' teachings. John comments on the unbelievable unbelief of Israel and how that, while it was a fulfillment of OT prophecy, this truth did not in any way minimize the human responsibility of every Israelite that rejected the Messiahship of Jesus. He also makes an astounding reference to Jesus being the glorious One that Isaiah saw in his vision in [Isa 6](#). John's comment on the unbelief of Israel is not the only theological problem he drops in our collective laps. He has another, just as puzzling dilemma to present to us in our text today so let's have a look at it...

42-43- Is it possible for someone to be a secret believer in Jesus? Is it possible to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of sin and be wholly committed to Him and yet be silent about it? This is the problem we're faced with in these verses. Although John has stated that the Jews nation as a whole rejected Jesus while He was with them, there were still many people who did believe on Him and some of them did not confess Him publicly. At first glance it seems that our text is saying that silent belief is possible because it says they believed in Jesus but did not confess Him. Of course, the wording John uses prompts us to wonder if the belief he speaks of here was genuine. It's impossible for us to not contrast our text with the Lord's own statement in [Luke 12:8-9](#) – done deal? Not so fast!

It's not hard to outline these verses because the actions depend on 3 verbs: believe, confess and love. The first 2 tells us what the individuals involved did and they seem to be contradictory. The 3rd verb explains the situation.

The 1st thing said about these men is that they believed on Jesus. This is John's usual phrase for speaking of true belief. He uses it that way 11 other times in his Gospel. Also, John says that many believed from among the rulers of the people and not just among the common folk. Since the previous

verses just stated that the majority of Israel didn't believe, this statement that some did believe is significant. It's John's way of saying that unbelief is never total. We see that human responsibility is still in effect regardless of the biblical prophecies, and that despite the spiritual depravity of the time, God always preserves for Himself a remnant. It is an observed characteristic of this book that after speaking of unbelief, John almost always adds that there are still some who followed Jesus.

From this perspective, it would appear that the belief of these rulers was genuine. But up to this point, we've said all we can say positively about these secret believers. Although they believed on Jesus, our text goes on to say that they did not confess their faith in Jesus for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue. They believed, in some sense but, having said this, there is no more good word to add.

Well, maybe one good thing can be said. It is at least true that they recognized the cost of true discipleship, even though they were unwilling to pay it. What was the cost? For them it involved excommunication - being barred from public worship, being excluded from the religious life of their nation, losing the sacrifices as atonement for sin. It involved loss of position, becoming a pariah, an outcast, one kept from associating with decent people and spoken of to children as a warning of the consequences of sin. These were no small items, particularly for those who had been leaders in Israel. They were costly—too costly.

These men may have believed on Jesus and may even have wished to confess him, but they recognized the cost of such discipleship and they refused to pay the price and so kept silent. They were trying to do something that ultimately is impossible—to be secret disciples. Someone has said that secret discipleship is a contradiction in terms; for either the secrecy kills the discipleship, or else the discipleship kills the secrecy. Maybe it was that, maybe they eventually came out for Jesus. But we do not know what happened. We only know that they ran a great risk. For, having failed to confess Him publicly, there's always the dangerous possibility of falling away privately.

Grace is a costly thing and it cannot be accepted from God lightly. Grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus. It is costly because it costs a man his life and it is grace

because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Most of all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son and what has cost God so much cannot be cheap for us. It believing on Jesus and confessing Him openly costly? Yes, bit it's the only wise thing to do. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" (Mt 16:26)

The 3rd verb in our text is love – John uses it to explain this contradictory and confusing dilemma. These men believed on Jesus but they didn't confess Him. Why? They didn't want to be kicked out of the synagogue, sure. But why did they value that so highly. The man born blind in ch9 was put out of the synagogue, yet he gladly endured that for the joy of knowing Jesus. What was wrong with these rulers? John tells us in vs43 – ultimately, these men could not find the courage to confess Jesus because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

We don't see it in our English translation but John actually presents a wonderful expression of irony in this verse. The English says that these believing rulers loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. This translation is technically correct. However, the word rendered praise here is not the normal word for praise but is almost always translated as glory everywhere else, the word *doxa*. This word was used by John seen in vs41, where he writes of the great vision of Isaiah. His use of the word here again illustrates the foolishness of these men in preferring earthly glory, no matter how impressive, to that overwhelming and magnificent glory that belongs to God.

These men had a scale of values: on one side they put the praise of men and on the other side the praise of God. There's a lot that can be said for the praise of God. They knew that by confessing Jesus they should be praising God and would be approved of Him. But, in their minds, there was even more to be said for the praise of men. They lived in a world that operated on the basis of mutual esteem. It was good to give deference to those who were above you in the social ladder and it was enjoyable to receive deference from those beneath you. In this scale, the followers of Jesus had nothing to offer. They all had lowly positions and were looked down on with contempt by all the important people in Jerusalem. In this balance the praise of men prevailed and these rulers decided it was better to be thought well of by their peers than to be accepted by Almighty God, to their eternal hurt. How sad!

One theologian put it this way: “No doubt these rulers thought themselves wise and prudent men; no doubt they thought that they were playing safe. But their wisdom did not extend to remembering that the opinion of men might matter for the few years in which they lived upon this earth; but the judgment of God matters for all eternity.” Another guy defined the praise of men a little more bluntly: “What is it else but a little stinking breath?” When you set them side by side, it’s obviously ridiculous to ever choose anything but the praise (glory) of God. Nothing else comes close in comparison. Buy yet, people still insist on going with the stinky breath and in ever increasing numbers. What will my friends think, my co-workers, my family, my spouse – if I openly confess Jesus as my Lord. I believe He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world but...will my confession of Him have an adverse effect on my life? All one needs to remember is that, in the end, only the praise of God will matter.

Were these men true believers? I’d have to say that at this point in their lives, it would be a no. But that’s only in that particular slice of time. Did some of them come to both believe in Jesus and confess Him openly? They may have, after His crucifixion and resurrection. In fact, by the end of Paul’s missionary journeys, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem told him that there were many myriads of Jews who had believed. Maybe some were of these men. We don’t know. What we do know is that belief in Jesus and confession of Him belong together ([Rom 10:9-10](#)). In normal belief, confession inevitably follows. God’s approval is of more value than anything this world has to offer.

44-50- John provides us with a resume of Jesus’ public discourses, a final summary of His teachings and true to form, as we’ve seen in nearly all His discourses in this book, Jesus speaks 1st about His relationship to the Father ([44-45](#)). He talks about this so much because it’s so important – it involves His deity. The importance of the deity of Jesus Christ is that we only come to know God only in him; and if Jesus isn’t God, then we don’t know what God is like at all because we have no basis for saying anything about Him.

If God doesn’t intervene in history to speak of Himself (in Scripture), and if He doesn’t act to reveal Himself (Jesus), then we have no knowledge of Him. We can infer things about God that we glean from nature and our

relationships with others but we won't know if any of its right. But, when God intervenes to tell us about Himself in Scripture—through men who were “borne along by the Holy Spirit”—then we have sure knowledge about God. That's why the Word of God is so important. And when God intervenes in human history in Jesus Christ to give us not just words but also to show us a personality, then we can come to know God personally.

What is God like? God is like Jesus. That's the importance of the deity of Jesus Christ. There are other important truths related with this, of course. But, in terms of our knowledge of God, which this Gospel emphasizes, the deity of Jesus Christ is important in that it is the ultimate and only solution to knowing Who God is and what He is like. Do you think God is love? We only know that because Jesus is love and showed it by dying on the cross for us. Do you think that god is holy, righteous and good? Do you want to know that God is filled with wisdom, that He understands you and can help you in any circumstance? He is, He does and He can. We know this because of Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, turn your eyes upon the Jesus of the Bible and see God revealed.

The 2nd thing Jesus taught was that He was a light that had come into the world to free those who believe on Him from darkness (46). Jesus taught that without Him, the world is in spiritual darkness. The world can understand things like mechanics, science, art, economics, relationship and many other aspects of this physical world. But spiritually, this world has no light at all. Jesus is the One who came to impart light in order that we might see what goodness, truth, and righteousness are, and above all might see what God Himself is.

It's not only that the world is in darkness and that Jesus is the light. Jesus also says that it's possible to be delivered out of that darkness. If the world is in darkness, we're in darkness. But Jesus Christ doesn't come just to reveal our darkness; He comes to lift us out of our darkness by means of His marvelous light. He says, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide (remain) in darkness.” The solution for spiritual darkness is to believe in Jesus Christ. If you do, you partake of His nature by believing on Him. You become “sons of light.”

The next thing Jesus teaches concerns the danger of unbelief (47-48). Here, Jesus speaks of a future day of judgment. Jesus came into the world

in grace. He comes in grace to all of us. This is the day of grace. He offers Himself as Savior. But this day of grace won't last forever and when Jesus returns to this earth He will come as a Judge. This is a dreadful thought to many a person but the Bible doesn't present His return as a dreadful thing. Look as **Ps 98:4-9**. The earth rejoices because Jesus comes to judge it. Why? Because, as we saw in His first coming; Jesus doesn't judge like any other. Completely just and good, His judgment is all about removing evil, wickedness and injustice. Today, creation itself groans under the weight of humanity's sin with all it's piled-up death and cruelty. His judgment means liberation!

It's like it was before Joshua took Israel into the Promised Land. The foul practices of the Canaanites (child sacrifice) made the very land wretch at their presence (**Lev 18:25**). The perpetrators had to be removed for the healing of a land God's people could inherit. In the same way, Jesus (true Joshua) returns to cleanse the earth for His people. That's why creation waits in eager expectation for that day. His judgment doesn't mean destruction for the creation once declared to be good; it means the destruction of all evil for the renewal of creation. That's terrible news for evil – and all those who insist on clinging to it but it is pure joy for all those who embrace Jesus Christ.

The fact that Jesus is the judge of all the earth is not evidence of a vicious and vindictive side to His character, finally showing itself at the end. Quite the opposite! The earth shaking power of Jesus doesn't mean that the humble friend of sinners has changed in His character. The reality is that, there at the end of all things, the world of men will finally see that His cause, His character, His light is victorious! His truth will drive out all lies; His beauty, ugliness; His goodness, evil. In the end, the Lamb of God wins! Everybody loves a winner but will you love Him too late?

The last thing Jesus leaves us with is a command to believe. Jesus speaks of a command He received from the Father and says this command is everlasting life. But, what exactly is this command? What command is everlasting life? Only this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That is God's commandment.

In much of our evangelism today, we treat the offer of salvation as nothing more than an invitation—an invitation to come and believe on Jesus, to give

one's heart to the Savior. This is true in one sense: Jesus did say, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden." But this is not all that can be said. The offer of salvation is an invitation, but it's also a command. When Paul preached at Athens he talked about the spiritual ignorance of the Athenians that, he said, God "overlooked" for a time, but now He "commands all men everywhere to repent" ([Acts 17:30](#)). This is not something to be toyed with; this is not something to be delayed. God is our Creator and Master, and He orders us to turn from our sin and to respond to Him in faith and be saved.

I do not want to seem harsh. Of course, the call to believe on Jesus is an invitation. It is out of love that the Lord Jesus Christ offers the command, speaks the words. It is out of love that God calls upon us to repent. But, at the same time, the matter of belief is not optional. It is required of us. Therefore, to fail to believe is not just a misfortune or a bad choice. It is sin.

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? What evidence can you point to in your life that proves you are different from all the other people around you? The Bible teaches that there are very specific fruits that are produced in the life of a true believer in Jesus: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control; just to name a few. If none of these are present in your life then you need to follow Peter's advice when he says to be diligent to make your call and elections sure. Put simply, make sure you're truly a believer. There is no reason not to be sure because the stakes are too high and the consequences are eternal.

If you are a Christian, you should understand that the judgment of Christ has already begun in the house of God, for those who are in Christ. Even now, the light of Jesus Christ has begun the work of driving away the gloomy night of our sin ([II Cor 4:6](#)). This is a kind and loving judgment! Our devilish darkness dispelled by the light of Jesus Christ! Is it at work in your life? Have you recognized it? Have you responded to it in obedience? Its sole purpose is for our ultimate good but it will only help us if we recognize it and respond positively to it. The Lord's desire is to change us into His image, from our glory to His glory, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Are you allowing Him to do this in your life? Or do you, like the men in our text today, prefer your own glory over the glory of God. There's no comparison so...why try to hold on to something that is only temporary at best and miss

out on something that is eternal? 😊