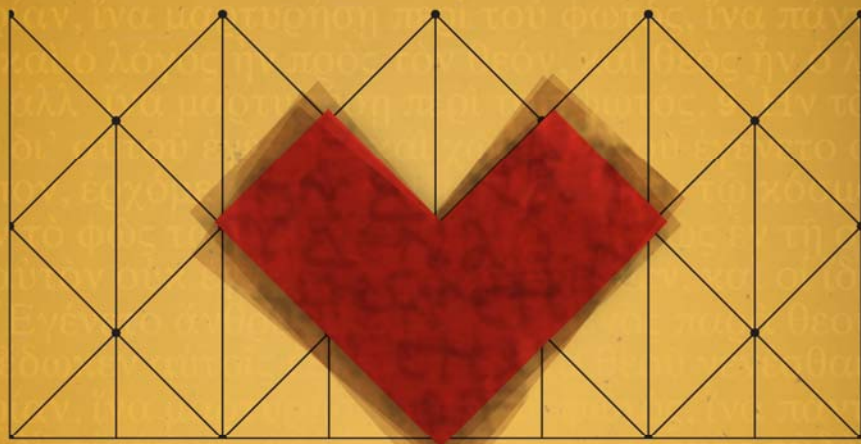


# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



# BELIEVE

Studies in the book of John

**PART SEVEN—John 11:1-12:50**

Group Applications

Personal Study



**FOUR OAKS CHURCH**

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# John 11:1-16

*When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable,  
and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written  
will come true:*

*"Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

*"Where, O death, is your victory?*

*Where, O death, is your sting?"*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But  
thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus  
Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let  
nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the  
Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

**1 Corinthians 15:54-58**

## Sickness Unto Death

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. Jesus had the power to heal Lazarus. Jesus loved and was good friends with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Jesus stayed where He was.

And Lazarus died.

All of those statements, when put together, sound like they generate a contradiction! Jesus loves Mary, Martha, and Lazarus! And He has the power to save Lazarus! And Lazarus dies! It's like the age-old problem of evil:

If God is all-loving, then He always eliminates evil and suffering as much as He can. If

God is all-powerful, then He has the power to eliminate all evil and suffering. Evil exists. Therefore, God does not exist.

The problem here is that love does not always eliminate evil. God, who is perfect in love, can permit and use evil to bring about His good purposes. In this passage, specifically, Jesus allows Lazarus to die for at least three reasons.

First, Jesus uses this opportunity to teach His disciples that for those who trust in Jesus, “this sickness will not end in death” (v. 4). For those who believe in Christ, death is not the end. Sure, we still have to feel the pangs of the temporary cessation of our bodies, but we have eternal life already in knowing God (John 17:3). Death is still a reality for the Christian, but the sting of death is gone (1 Cor. 15:57). Death is not final. Death does not rule over us. Because we trust Christ, our lives, our futures, our hope, our treasure is secure in Him forever (Colossians 3:3, Ephesians 2:6).

The second reason Jesus permits this death “is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (v. 4). The death of Lazarus was ordained and permitted so that God would be glorified, and more specifically, the Father sought to glorify His Son through the working of this miracle.

The third reason is that Jesus wanted to strengthen the faith of His disciples. All through Jesus’ earthly ministry, his disciples flake harder than a burnt croissant. Every now and again they show signs of grasping the weight of Jesus’ self-revelation, but their pre-Pentecost careers are plagued with doubt, denial, betrayal, hopelessness, confusion, violence, and utter bewilderment. Jesus takes this opportunity to prepare the disciples for the work that they will do after He ascends to heaven. He tells them that He was “glad” to have not been there to heal Lazarus “so that you might believe” (v. 14). Jesus permitted this tragedy in order to bolster His disciples’ faith and further reveal Himself to them.

And yet, even with all of this, John tells us that Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus (v. 35). Perfectly human and perfectly divine, Jesus teaches us both that God’s reasons are higher than our own and that sin’s effects on the world should be mourned over. Even when it seems there’s no conceivable reason for some evil—even when the tears have blurred the doctrines of sovereignty--we can rest in the beautiful truth that God chose to suffer with us, as one of us. He felt heartache, betrayal, and He died an unjust death for us. For that reason, we can trust His reasons for permitting suffering in our lives.

[illegible]

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. How does this passage help us understand God's reasons for permitting tragedy?

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2. What does this passage teach us about God's plan for death?

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## Go

1. What are misconceptions non-believers have about the humanity of Jesus?

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2. In what ways can you utilize this passage to comfort others in suffering?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Have you experienced a close friend or family member passing away? If so, share about the circumstances and how you were impacted.

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2. In our passage, Jesus hears that Lazarus is dying, but He delays going to see him. Without knowing the end of the story, what conclusions might you have made about Jesus?

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3. Verses 5-6 say that Jesus loved and delayed responding. Can both those things be true? How do you reconcile them?

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4. In what ways does it feel like Jesus is currently delaying to respond in your life? How is that affecting you? How might you see your circumstances differently if they were seen through the lens of "Jesus loves you"?

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5. Jesus' intent is for His disciples to believe (verse 14) and give glory to God (verse 4). In your current situation, how is God calling you to trust and give honor to Him? Spend some time as a group praying for both the circumstances and one another's hearts in the midst of them.

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## Additional Reading

From Homily on the Ancestry of Christ by Basil the Great<sup>1</sup>

Let us strive to comprehend the mystery. The reason God is in the flesh is to kill the death that lurks there. As diseases are cured by medicines and assimilated by the body, and as darkness in a house is dispelled by the coming of light, so death, which held sway over human nature, is done away with by the coming of God. And as ice formed on water covers its surface as long as night and darkness last but melts under the warmth of the sun, so death reigned until the coming of Christ; but when the grace of God our Savior appeared and the Sun of Justice rose, death was swallowed up in victory, unable to bear the presence of true life. How great is God's goodness, how deep his love for us!

Let us join the shepherds in giving glory to God, let us dance with the angels and sing: Today a Savior has been born to us. He is Christ the Lord. The Lord is God and He has appeared to us, not as God, which would have been terrifying for our weakness, but as a slave so as to free those who live in slavery. Who could be so lacking in sensibility and so ungrateful as not to join all here present in our gladness, exultation, and radiant joy? This feast belongs to the whole of creation. Let everyone join in and be grateful. Let our voices too ring out in songs of jubilation!

From The Sickness Unto Death by Soren Kierkegaard<sup>2</sup>

"This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4), and yet Lazarus died; for when the disciples misunderstood the words which Christ adjoined later, "Lazarus our friend is asleep, but I go to wake him out of his sleep" (11:11), He said plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (11:14). So then Lazarus is dead, and yet this sickness was not unto death. Now we know that Christ was thinking of the miracle which would permit the bystanders, "if they believed, to see the glory of God" (11:40), the miracle by which He awoke Lazarus from the dead, so that this sickness was not only not unto death....Oh, but even if Christ had not awakened Lazarus from the dead, is it not true that this sickness, that death

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<sup>1</sup>Basil the Great in Homily on the Ancestry of Christ 2.6

<sup>2</sup>Kierkegaard, Soren. "The Sickness Unto Death." The Natural Thinker, [www.naturalthinker.net/trl/texts/Kierkegaard,Soren/TheSicknessUntoDeath.pdf](http://www.naturalthinker.net/trl/texts/Kierkegaard,Soren/TheSicknessUntoDeath.pdf).



itself, was not a sickness unto death? When Christ comes to the grave and cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth" (11:43), it is evident enough that "this" sickness is not unto death. But even if Christ had not said these words -- merely the fact that He, who is "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), comes to the grave, is not this a sufficient sign that this sickness is not unto death, does not the fact that Christ exists mean that this sickness is not unto death? And what help would it have been to Lazarus to be awakened from the dead, if the thing must end after all with his dying -- how would that have helped Lazarus, if He did not live who is the resurrection and the life for everyone who believes in Him? No, it is not because Lazarus was awakened from the dead, not for this can one say that this sickness is not unto death; but because He lives, therefore this sickness is not unto death. For, humanly speaking, death is the last thing of all; and, humanly speaking, there is hope only so long as there is life. But Christianly understood death is by no means the last thing of all, hence it is only a little event within that which is all, an eternal life; and Christianly understood there is in death infinitely much more hope than merely humanly speaking there is when there not only is life but this life exhibits the fullest health and vigor. So then in the Christian understanding of it not even death is the sickness unto death, still less everything which is called earthly and temporal suffering: want, sickness, wretchedness, affliction, adversities, torments, mental sufferings, sorrow, grief. And even if such things are so painful and hard to bear that we men say, or at all events the sufferer says, "This is worse than death" -- everything of the sort, which, if it is not a sickness, is comparable to a sickness, is nevertheless, in the Christian understanding of it, not the sickness unto death. So it is that Christianity has taught the Christian to think dauntlessly of everything earthly and worldly, including death....

# John 11:17-44

*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 5:24**

## **The Resurrection and the Life**

The Bible tells us that we have one major problem: sin. Sin unleashed a domino effect that brought about death and suffering in our world. It came into our world and spread to every man and thus every man eventually dies (Romans 5:12). The Bible even calls our spiritual state while we are physically alive as 'dead in sins' (Ephesians 2:1). What does it mean to be dead yet still alive? It means we are cut off from God Himself. It is both physical and spiritual death.

Jesus could have kept Lazarus from getting sick if He wanted to, but it was His intention to bring this to pass "so that [we] may believe" (John 11:15). Jesus waited for Lazarus to die so that He could show His disciples and those around them that He is the Resurrection and the Life. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Resurrection? It means that by believing that He is the Son of God, we will be raised from both spiritual and physical death. Martha knew her brother would be resurrected on the final day of judgement, but Jesus told her that because He was the resurrection, then He could raise Lazarus from the dead immediately. He then told her that the kind of resurrection that He gave was spiritual in nature so that "he who believes in [Jesus] will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in [Him] will never die" (v25-26). Jesus' point was that once He raised someone from spiritual death, they would never truly die, for they would be physically resurrected in the last days and go onto eternal life. When Jesus said that He was the Life, He was pointing to the fact that not only are we resurrected from death by trusting in Him, but He gives us eternal life (John 3:36), that is, we will live and reign with Him for eternity (2 Timothy 2:11-12a).

The story of Lazarus is our story. We too were dead in our transgressions, but God made us alive (Colossians 2:13). We were once just as Lazarus was: dead. Though our death was spiritual, Jesus uses this to say that if a person believes in Him, they will

never truly die. Jesus used Lazarus’ physical death as an analogy to our spiritual state before salvation, and just as He told Lazarus to come out of the physical grave, He calls us to come out of our spiritual graves. And one day He will call us forth like Lazarus from death to eternal life.

Sermon notes

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## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. What kind of comfort does this passage provide in the face of death?

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2. What does Jesus' weeping tell us about God's character?

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## Go

1. In what ways does American culture respond to the concept of death?

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2. Discuss the last time you talked about death with an unbeliever? What was it like? What responses did you receive?

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## Discussion questions

1. Jesus says that He is the resurrection and the life. What does that mean to you?

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2. Mary and Martha both grieve over the death of their brother. How does Jesus minister to them with His words and actions? What might we learn from Jesus as we seek to care for others in the midst of suffering?

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3. Why do you think Jesus wept? How might you relate to Him in your times of grief?

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4. Jesus had planned all along to raise Lazarus to help people believe and see the glory of God (verses 4 & 14 are repeated in verse 40). What are some ways you can look back now and see God's plan in your life?

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5. Jesus has the power to raise dead people back to life! What is a miracle you're longing to see Jesus do for you? Spend some time in prayer for these things.

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## Additional Reading

From Why Jesus Wept by Jon Bloom<sup>1</sup>

The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35: “Jesus wept.” But for all its grammatical simplicity, it’s packed with unfathomable complexity. Jesus wept after speaking with Lazarus’ grieving sisters, Martha and Mary, and seeing all the mourners. That seems natural enough. Except that Jesus had come to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew that in a few short minutes all this weeping would turn to astonished joy, and then tearful laughter, and then worship.

So, one would think that Jesus would be a confident, joyful calm in that storm of sorrow. But He was “greatly troubled” (John 11:33), and He wept. Why?

### 1. COMPASSION FOR SUFFERING

One reason is simply the deep compassion that Jesus felt for those who were suffering. It is true that Jesus let Lazarus die. He delayed coming, and He did not speak healing from a distance like He did for the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:13). His reasons were good and merciful and glorious. But this did not mean Jesus took the suffering it caused lightly. “For he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:33).

Even though Jesus always chooses what will ultimately bring His Father the most glory (John 11:4) – and sometimes, as in Lazarus’ case, it requires affliction and grief – He does not take delight in the affliction and grief itself. No, Jesus is sympathetic (Hebrews 4:15). And as “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), in Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus we get a glimpse of how the Father feels over the affliction and grief His children experience.

### 2. THE CALAMITY OF SIN

Jesus also wept over the calamity of sin. As God the Son who had come into the world to destroy the devil’s works (1 John 3:8), Jesus was about to deliver death its deathblow (1 Corinthians 15:26). But sin grieves God deeply, and so do the wages of sin: death (Romans 6:23). And ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, He had endured sin’s horrific destruction. Death had consumed almost every human being He had created (all except Elijah and Enoch). It had taken Lazarus, and it would take him again before it was all over. Tears of

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<sup>1</sup>Bloom, Jon. “Why Jesus Wept.” Desiring God, Desiring God Ministries, 29 Apr. 2011, [www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-jesus-wept](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-jesus-wept).

anger and longing were mixed with Jesus' tears of grief.

### 3. THE COST OF REDEMPTION

A third reason for weeping was the cost that He was about to pay to purchase not only Lazarus' short-term resurrection, but his everlasting life. The cross was just days away, and no one really knew the inner distress Jesus was experiencing (Luke 12:50). Lazarus' resurrection would look and be experienced by Lazarus and everyone else as a gift of grace. But, oh, it was not free. Jesus was going to die a horrific death to purchase it. And the most horrific part was not crucifixion, as unimaginable as that alone would have been. He was dreading His Father's wrath. Jesus, who had never known sin, was about to become Lazarus' sin, and the sin of all who had or would believe in Him, so that in Him they would all become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was looking to the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). But the reality of what lay between was weighing heavily.

### 4. THE CAUSE OF HIS OWN DEATH

A fourth possible reason for Jesus' tears was that He knew that raising Lazarus would actually cause the religious leaders to finally take action to put Him to death (John 11:45-53). In this account, most of us probably marvel at Jesus' incredible trust that His Father would answer him. We have such little faith. If Jesus had any struggle that day, it would not have been whether His Father would answer, but what would result when His Father answered. Calling Lazarus out of the tomb would have taken a different kind of resolve for Jesus than we might have imagined. Giving Lazarus life was sealing Jesus' own death.

Just these few reasons for Jesus' weeping at Lazarus' tomb give us a glimpse into how God views our suffering and death. His reasons for not sparing us these things are righteous and glorious. But in them He is full of compassion (Psalm 103:13). He hates the calamity sin brings, and He Himself has suffered more than we will ever know in order to pay the full cost of our eternal redemption.

"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). And when that morning comes, "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore" (Revelation 21:4).

# John 11:45-57

*"They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits...'"* **Genesis 37:18-20**

*"As for you, you meant this for evil against evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."*

**Genesis 50:20**

## What You Meant For Evil, God Meant For Good

John 11 centers around Jesus' fantastic miracle—raising Lazarus from the dead. In response, the Pharisees and chief priests decided to come together to develop a plan to kill Him. Now these men weren't random maniacs that just killed people left and right. The Pharisees and chief priests were known as some of the "holiest" and "religious" people in the city. Why were they angry? Because Jesus spoke as if He were God and contradicted everything the Pharisees believed. His miracles only added insult to injury as the Pharisees were forced to stop Him the only way they knew how—murder.

Although our reading is in the New Testament, this situation isn't new to God. If we turn the clock to Genesis, we see something very similar. Reading Genesis chapter 37 we observe a group of brothers who are the sons of a man named Jacob. One of the brothers, Joseph, appeared to be Jacob's favorite, which drew the envy of the others. In those days the oldest child got everything. So they were not happy when Jacob showed greater favor to Joseph. In pride, Joseph told his whole family he had a dream that one day they would all bow before him. The brothers did not take this well and executed a plan to sell him into slavery. Despite this evil committed against Joseph,



God worked through their evil to make Joseph the second in command in all of Egypt, and therefore the second most powerful man in the world. Through wise decision-making, Joseph enabled Egypt to become the country that ended up feeding most of the Eastern world.

When we fast forward to chapter 50, we see Joseph's brothers on their knees in repentance asking for Joseph's forgiveness. Now this is probably the biggest chance for Joseph to have his payback. The same brothers who sold him into slavery are begging for their lives, but Joseph does something different. He says "...you meant this for evil against me, but God meant it for good..." Joseph points out that only God, through Joseph's pain and suffering, was able to feed the world. God took the evil actions of these brothers to create goodness. This is the same God we serve today.

Like Joseph's brothers, these Pharisees intend to do evil. But like Joseph, God intended the actions of the Pharisees for good. Only through the brothers selling Joseph into slavery could the nations be fed, and only through the suffering and murder of Jesus Christ could the nations truly be saved. With Joseph, God used his suffering to feed the nations, but this food was there one day, and gone the next. But the evil committed against Jesus was the means by which God provided spiritual bread for all who would believe that would last forever. This is the confidence we have in God—that He works all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Even the darkest of evils cannot thwart His plans.

[illegible]

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. In what ways has God used suffering in your life to bring about a good purpose?

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2. What are common temptations you face in suffering?

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## Go

1. What are some ways you can help others in their suffering?

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2. In what ways would you approach a non-believer on the topic of suffering?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when something seemed so obvious to you but not to others. What was the situation? How did it make you feel?

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2. Jesus' miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead leads some to believe in Him as the Messiah but others to try to arrest and kill Him. Why do you think this healing created such division?

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3. How does it make you feel when someone rejects Jesus? How might Jesus and his disciples have felt when the Jews rejected Him?

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4. The Scriptures say that Caiphas' prophecy about Jesus' death was not of his own accord. What comfort might this fact of God speaking through an unbeliever bring you in the midst of what you're currently experiencing?

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5. Verse 54 says that Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews because they planned to kill Him. Today, Christians in certain parts of the world must follow Jesus' example to wisely flee persecution. Spend some time praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ in these areas. (If you want more information about the persecuted church, go to the Voice of the Martyrs webpage at [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).)

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## Additional Reading

From [Don't Waste Your Suffering](#) by Kristen Wetherell<sup>1</sup>

Picture someone you know well who isn't a Christian. As they watch you walk through suffering, what do they see? What do they hear? What are you communicating to them about the hope you have?

Suffering can be distracting. It can embitter the spirit, harden the heart, and paralyze the will. Turning us inward, it often keeps us from seeing opportunities God is placing around us to love others and share the gospel. At times, we're tempted to forego proclaiming Christ because we're defeated by sin, exhausted from bodily pain, or emotionally spent from attempts to reconcile broken relationships. Suffering seems to require all our attention and effort as it drains us of resources. We feel we have nothing left to give.

Paul writes that we're brittle "jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7). And our cracks exist for a purpose: to shine forth the gospel, our treasured possession even—especially—in our pain. We display and proclaim his light through our unique "cracks." And what an opportunity this is. While chained in a Roman prison, Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians: Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Col. 4:2–6)

Notice where Paul is as he writes: in prison. He's suffering. And yet it seems he's increasingly empowered by his situation, not defeated by it. His physical chains have encouraged him to keep proclaiming the truth that's spiritually unchained him!

Imprisoned, yet bold. This is not an embittered, hardened, paralyzed man. Paul is not distracted. No, he knows his persecutions and "cracks" are opportunities for gospel outpouring, not obstacles to hide. In Christ's light, suffering is a ministry, not a

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<sup>1</sup>Wetherell, Kristen. "Don't Waste Your Suffering." The Gospel Coalition, 1 Apr. 2017, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-waste-your-suffering/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-waste-your-suffering/).

millstone. It's a gift, not a glitch in the plan. Can you see your suffering as a unique opportunity to proclaim the mystery of Christ to unbelievers? They're watching you, and they're listening to you. What are they seeing and hearing?

# John 12:1-8

*“Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”*

**Matthew 26:13**

## The Worth of Jesus

Chapter 12 opens with Jesus returning for the last time to Bethany for the Passover. Jesus just raised Lazarus from the dead and caused a great deal of controversy and anger from His enemies. One of the key words in this chapter is ‘therefore’ (John 12:1). Jesus’ journey to the cross is imminent. He’s moving toward danger, not away from it. This will be His last Passover.

Imagine the wonder Mary and Martha must have experienced seeing their dead brother walk out of his grave! Martha probably reflected on what Jesus told her in chapter 11 verse 25, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

At dinner, Lazarus reclined at the table with Jesus while Martha did what she knew best—served others. Mary out of thankfulness and a heart full of gratitude, took a pound of expensive ointment and anointed Jesus’ feet. In those days, people did not bathe every day and had to walk for miles to get from place to place resulting in dirty and smelly feet. Attending to the feet of house guests was the work of the servants. When Mary got on her knees and poured this perfume over Jesus’ feet, it was a demonstration of her humility and thankfulness. Jesus is worth all of our praise and adoration.

Judas was quick to point out that the perfume was worth a year’s wage. So, imagine a year’s worth of today’s minimum wage (say roughly \$25,000) poured over Jesus. Judas thought the perfume could have been sold and given to the poor. It’s not a bad idea, but don’t let Judas fool you. He did not care for the poor. In fact, he was a thief (John 12:6). He only cared about money, and in a few days, he will sell Jesus for money. John Piper states, “It’s suicidal when our affections don’t match the worth of Jesus.” His care

for the poor was only a cover-up for his covetous heart.

Jesus tells Judas to leave her alone for “you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me (Matthew 26:11).” Jesus points out His worth to us! He is more important and infinitely greater in value than anything else this world has to offer. Mary tasted and saw that the Lord was good. Jesus is worth living for. He is the Resurrection and the Life. There is no life found outside of Jesus. Mary knew this and her affections showed it.

Do your affections for Jesus match His worth? I'm reminded of the song, "Jesus is better than all riches, make my heart believe." Jesus is worth more than anything this world has to offer. Are we living like it?

## Sermon notes

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## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. In what ways are you tempted to treasure money over Jesus?

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2. What is the relationship between gratitude and greed?

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## Go

1. In what ways would the average non-believer respond to the question "What does worship mean?"

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2. How would you use this passage to explain to a non-believer what worship is?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you either gave or received a very special gift. How did it make you feel?

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2. When Mary anoints Jesus' feet, what sacrifices was she making? What does this show us about her faith in and love for Him?

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3. When was a time that you particularly showed your faith in and love for Jesus? Did you experience any opposition like Mary did with Judas?

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4. Jesus concludes this narrative by saying, "The poor you will always have with you, but you do not always have me." What did he mean? How does that truth apply to us today and our relationship with Jesus and the poor?

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5. Mary paid a great price to show her love for Jesus. How would you characterize your love for Jesus right now? How might you grow?
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## Additional Reading

From Anointed for Burial (Ligonier Ministries)<sup>1</sup>

Each night during the last week of His life Jesus is staying in Bethany, a village about an hour's walk from Jerusalem (Matt. 21:17), probably because the Holy City, filled to the brim with Passover pilgrims, has few vacancies. According to John 12:1-8, the event described in today's passage takes place in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, friends of our Lord in Bethany. Mary is the woman who anoints Christ. Since Matthew 26:6 tells us the residence belongs to Simon the leper (most likely a former leper), a number of commentators have surmised that Simon is the father of the three siblings who also live there. Luke records a different, comparable anointing in Galilee (7:36-50).

Mary's ointment (oil) is worth three hundred denarii (John 12:5), a year's wage for most first-century Palestinians, indicating that she means to honor the Lord with all that she has when she pours oil on Him (Matt. 26:7). The costly substance is held in an "alabaster flask," a thin-necked container made from marble. When Mary snaps off the neck of the flask to anoint the Savior, she may intend to mark Him off as the Messiah, since it was commonplace to anoint the kings of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13). It is doubtful that she is aware of the significance Jesus sees in her service (Matt. 26:12), but our Lord's reference to His burial indicates that His passion is foremost in His mind. This explains His rebuke to His disciples over their concern that Mary has anointed Jesus instead of selling the anointing oil for the sake of the poor (vv. 8-10). Their concern for the impoverished is not wrong, but their priorities are. Jesus is about to leave their presence physically in His death, resurrection, and ascension. His time is short; thus, Mary's one last act of love before Jesus goes to the cross is not misplaced (v. 11).

It is easy to adopt self-righteously the disciples' outlook and think it always wrong to use church funds for things other than feeding the poor. Yet God's desire for beauty in worship (Ex. 28:2) and Jesus' words in Matthew 26:10-13 show that spending money on church buildings and other such things is not inappropriate. Still, as the poor among us are easily overlooked, helping them must always be one of the highest priorities in the church (Prov. 14:21, 31).

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<sup>1</sup>"Ligonier Ministries The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul." Ligonier Ministries, [www.ligonier.org/](http://www.ligonier.org/)

# John 12:9-19

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

**Philippians 2:5-11**

## Continue to Bear Witness

The crowd that had gathered on the hillside of Jerusalem as Jesus entered Jerusalem was a mixture of two groups. The first group had been in Bethany, just two miles away from Jerusalem, where Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. It was a miracle unlike any that they had ever seen. Before their eyes, Jesus demonstrated His power over death by calling Lazarus out of a tomb and back to life. John 12:17 says that these people continued to bear witness about what they saw and believed about Jesus. The second group was composed of those who had heard about this miracle. They came because they heard and believed and gathered as a massive crowd on what is now called Palm Sunday. They worshipped Jesus in part because of the witness of the first group.

The first group from Bethany is a model for us. They were not silenced or suppressed, but continued to bear witness about Jesus. We as Christians are commanded to magnify Christ by bearing witness to the truth. Jesus did not come as a king of

conquest and battle, but of humility and sacrifice. He did not come to bring an end to Roman oppression, but to free us from slavery to sin and death. The truth of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has brought peace to God's people, defeated sin and death, and is coming again to reign for all eternity. Sometimes our expectations of what should happen are not God's plans for us. This is the truth that we believe and that we are sent to share. God is still at work today in His people, empowering them by the Spirit to use them as a means for salvation.

In verse 19, the Pharisees cry out in exasperation that "the world has gone after him." This is ironic because by "the world," the Pharisees mean everyone in the Jerusalem area. However, in this book, John uses "the world" to refer to "people everywhere without racial distinction who are lost and in rebellion against God. In truth, the aim of Jesus' mission was to save the world." (Carson, 1991, p. 435) This is the truth we stand on, that emboldens us to speak and to walk in humility. The love of God is far greater than our highest expectations, and that's why the gospel is such good news!

[illegible]

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. What were the Israelites' expectations of Jesus and where did they come from?
2. Read Philippians 2:5-11 and Zechariah 9:9-13. What parallels do you notice? In what ways do they relate to John 12:9-19?

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## Go

1. How did God use the witness of others to draw you to Himself?
2. How can the first group from Bethany be a model for you in your current community?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when the Spirit of God moved in you and others to worship the Lord together. What were the circumstances? How did you feel?

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2. Palm Sunday features a large crowd praising Jesus as the King of Israel. What did this “worship service” look like? Look at a parallel account in Matthew 21:1-11 for additional details.

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3. While the crowd praised Jesus, what was their focus (see verse 18)? To what extent do you think it was true worship since they did not fully understand who Jesus was or what He came to Jerusalem to do in a few short days?

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4. Characterize your worship of Jesus. How are you like and not like the crowd?

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5. How would you like to grow in your worship of Jesus? Spend some time in prayer for one another. In addition, pray for those in your life who are like the crowd that fell away once difficulty arose.

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## Additional Reading

From The Triumphal Entry (Ligonier Ministries)<sup>1</sup>

Riding on a humble beast of burden is not the way in which most people would expect a king to enter into His reign, but that is exactly how the Lord of glory entered His. Though almost no one could see it at the time, Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday marked the beginning of the final events that would lead to His exaltation (Matt. 21:1-11).

When we say that almost no one could see it at the time, we are not speaking of what the crowd of Passover pilgrims first thought when they saw Jesus approaching Jerusalem on a donkey. The greatest king in their history, after all, often rode through the Holy City and the Promised Land in a similar manner (2 Sam. 13:29; 1 Kings 1:33). Thus, the people who cried "Hosanna to the Son of David!" on Palm Sunday expected a mighty, conquering king, one who would throw off the yoke of their Gentile oppressors just as David had defeated the Philistines centuries earlier.

Yet the people failed to see the true import of the Davidic king riding on a lowly beast of burden. Yes, David was a conquering king, but he defeated his enemies not in his own strength but in the strength of the Lord. Moreover, for all of his military prowess, David could not provide permanent rest to his people. After his death, his son Solomon enjoyed peace for a time, but this golden age came to an end when God brought enemies against Solomon to discipline him for his idolatry (1 Kings 11:9-40).

The true enemies that had to be defeated were not pagan Gentiles but rather sin and death. This could not be done on a white horse and with great armies. Instead, it took humility, a willingness to take the form of a servant and submit to the punishment that God's people deserve for their sin (Phil. 2:5-11). Only by receiving the worst that sin and death could throw at Him could the Davidic king "outsmart" our enemies. In thinking that they were gaining the upper hand, sin, death, and even Satan himself did not see that their actions were ultimately working under the sovereignty of God so that His wrath would be satisfied in the death of His Son. They did not see that by

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<sup>1</sup>"Ligonier Ministries The Teaching Fellowship of R.C. Sproul." Ligonier Ministries, [www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/triumphal-entry/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/triumphal-entry/).

killing Jesus they were actually ensuring their own defeat, for the Son of David whom they murdered was stronger than death itself. Passing through death, He conquered it by rising again. Jesus took the worst that His foes could do and triumphed over it. His humble entry into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy anticipated His final conquering act.

# John 12:20-36a

*The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will  
also live with him.*

**2 Timothy 2:11**

## The Hour of Glorification

A common theme to note throughout the Gospel of John is the concept of Jesus' "hour". Jesus tells His mother that His "hour [had] not yet come" when she implores Him to do something about the depletion of wine at the wedding in Cana (2:4). Later, John writes, "His hour had not yet come" when the Jews sought to arrest Jesus (7:30), and then again when the Pharisees sought to seize Jesus in the temple for speaking about being the light of the world (8:20). The same cryptic phrase appears in John 12:20-36. The passage begins with some Gentiles seeking Jesus before the Passover. They desired to see Him, likely to hear His teaching and marvel at the miracles He performed. This is immediately following plots to kill Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders. When the Gentiles came to Him, however, instead of directly replying to them, He responds to the significance of the moment by saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). So, what is this hour, and how will the Son of Man be glorified through it?

Jesus answers through an illustration, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). What happens when a grain of wheat falls into the earth? It grows a harvest. The "hour" is the time of Jesus' death, when His body falls into the earth. But there is hope. Jesus is not merely foretelling His death but rather His death followed by His glorification. Because the Son of God died, He bore a harvest of believers. If you are in Christ, you are the fruit of His hour! Jesus says that He has come for this hour, so He came for glorification. Then, a rich promise is given from the voice of the Father to the Son, "I have glorified [my name], and I will glorify it again" (12:28). Jesus glorified the Father on Earth, and He will be glorified again as He is reunited with His Father.

What do we do with this concept of the hour as believers? Verse 25 gives us a promise. It says that if we love our life we will lose it, but if we hate it, we keep it eternally. This

# Sermon Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. How are your trials, struggles, and burdens an opportunity to participate in the suffering and glory of Jesus?
2. Write about a time when you were forced to submit to God's timing over your own. What was the outcome?

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## Go

1. How would you explain to a non-believer why Jesus' death was glorious?
2. How would you explain to a non-believer what "hate your life" means with regard to the Christian life?

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## Discussion Questions

1. The Greeks wanted to see Jesus (verse 21). When was a time you particularly wanted to see Him?

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2. Jesus responds to the Greeks' request to see Him by saying that His pathway to glory and fruitfulness would come through death. What does He mean?

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3. Jesus then says that anyone who serves Him must follow Him. What does it look like for you to serve and follow Jesus today?

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4. Jesus also says that the Father will honor those who serve and follow Jesus. How might that promise help you to persevere right now?

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5. Through Jesus' death, He will both cast out the ruler of this world and draw all people to Himself (verses 31-32). What are specific ways you desire Jesus to triumph over evil and draw people to Himself? Spend some time praying for these things together.

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## Additional Reading

From Winning by Losing: The Paradox of Discipleship by John MacArthur<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean to live a life of self-denial, dying to self? What does that really mean? Have you ever thought about that? Think of it this way. When you are neglected, unforgiven, or when you are purposely set at naught and you sting and you hurt with the insult of that oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed and your advice is disregarded and your opinions are ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, you take it all patiently in loving silence, you're dying to self.

And when you lovingly and patiently bear any disgrace, any regularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face to face with folly and extravagance and spiritual insensitivity, and endure it as Jesus did, that is dying to self. When you are content with any food, any money, any clothing, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. And when you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works, or itch after commendation from others, and when you truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you see your brother prosper and have his needs wondrously met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy and never question God, though your needs are greater and still unmet, that is dying to self. And when you can receive correction, and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and humbly admit inwardly as well as outwardly that he's right and find no resentment and no rebellion in your heart, that is dying to self.

Are you dead yet?

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John. "Winning by Losing: The Paradox of Discipleship." Grace to You, 24 Oct. 1982, [www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2321/winning-by-losing--the-paradox-of-discipleship](http://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2321/winning-by-losing--the-paradox-of-discipleship).

# John 12:36b-50

*... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

**Romans 10:9-10**

## To God Be the Glory

The book of John was written to establish and strengthen our belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, because by believing we have life in Christ's name (John 20:31). But what is belief without confession? Can the two be separated? Confession is our open declaration of faith. In Matthew 10:32 Jesus says, "everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven." We need to affirm that Jesus is Lord, not just once, but in the way we live and the way we speak.

By our mouth we speak words to one another. By our words we reveal the content of our hearts. When we believe in Christ our lives are forever changed. We express our new life in our conversations, in our prayers, by sharing the gospel, and testifying to how God is at work in our lives. The passage in John states that many people, even some who held positions of authority, believed Jesus was the Messiah. However, their belief was not genuine belief for their belief was superficial and had no lasting impact. As James writes, "We know that even demons believe in God, but do not accept him as Lord (James 2:19)."

Likewise, none of those who professed belief were willing to confess it for fear of being cast out from the synagogues. They loved the momentary and fleeting glory that came from man more than the glory that came from God. Jesus tells us that what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15). True Glory belongs to



# Sermon Notes

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## Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

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## Grow

1. When has praise from others caused you to rely on your own abilities rather than the Lord?

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2. In what ways do you struggle with being driven by what others think?

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## Go

1. What are some obstacles that prevent you from sharing your faith with people in your community?

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## Discussion Questions

1. When was a time that you were blind to the glory of God? How did God help you to see?

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2. John says, "Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him." How does that make you feel? How might we respond in faith even when people reject Jesus?

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3. John concludes that the reason the Pharisees did not believe is that "they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." How do you see that played out in people's lives today? What about in your own life?

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4. Jesus says that those who believe in Him will receive His words. How are faith and obedience tied together?

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5. In what ways are you currently not receiving Jesus' words? How is that tied to your faith? (In other words, what are you believing when you don't obey him?)

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6. Jesus says, "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." Pray for those currently in darkness that they would see the light of Jesus.

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## Additional Reading

From The Love of Human Praise as the Root of Unbelief by John Piper<sup>1</sup>

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” That is, you can’t believe. Why? Because you love the glory of man, not the glory of God. You don’t want Jesus because you want human praise. You don’t want Jesus, because you want to be the center. You want to be in control. You want to be exalted. You want to be made much of. You love being somebody. Pick whichever of those fits best. They all fit me, apart from sovereign grace. This, Jesus says, is the root cause of unbelief. And how does it work? Verse 43: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.” Why would they receive a Messiah who comes in his own name? Because if the Messiah were like that, he would be like them; he would be an endorsement of the way they are. He would make them feel okay with their love of their own name and their own self-exaltation.

But Jesus comes in the name of his Father. In his humanity, he humbles himself and becomes obedient – to whom? To his Father. How humble? How obedient? Obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Philippians 2:8). They could see it coming. And they didn’t like it. If the Messiah is like this, then we will have to be like this. If God is pleased with this kind of self-denial in the Messiah, then he will look for it in us. We don’t want that. Therefore, we will not come. “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me.”

This is not a uniquely Jewish problem. This is a human problem. This is John Piper’s problem – perhaps his main problem. And this is your problem – perhaps your main problem. It is a great bondage. And Jesus came into the world to set us free from our slavery to the approval and the praise of others.

### BREAKING THE ADDICTION OF HUMAN APPROVAL

Why is the love of human glory, rather than God’s glory, so contradictory to faith? I can see two reasons.

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<sup>1</sup>Piper, John. “The Love of Human Praise as the Root of Unbelief.” Desiring God, Desiring God Ministries, 2 Apr. 2018, [www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-love-of-human-praise-as-the-root-of-unbelief](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-love-of-human-praise-as-the-root-of-unbelief).

One is that true faith in Jesus gives all glory to God and none to ourselves. In Romans 4:20, Paul says that Abraham “grew strong in his faith giving glory to God.” That is the nature of saving faith. When you come to Jesus in faith, you surrender the right to claim any glory for yourself. He owes us none. He will glorify us in due season (Romans 8:30). But that will be God’s glory, not ours, even when he shares it with us. Faith comes to Christ destitute of any claim to be glorious or to be praised. So the love of human praise is a great obstacle to faith. It must die.

The other reason the love of human glory is contradictory to faith is that faith is a drinking of living water for the satisfaction of our souls. And the well of that water is the glory of Christ. And when we are satisfied with him, the enslaving power of the craving for human glory is broken. Broken by the power of a superior satisfaction. When you have tasted the beauty of God and the approval of God in Christ, the addiction to human approval is broken. And you are free.









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