

Grave Warnings – John 12:36b-43

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John 12:36b-43. After spending 6 weeks on the foundations of a solid church, we're back to our study of the Gospel of John. The ministry and life of Christ.

And we've covered a lot. From the eternal nature of Jesus as the Word, to his sacrifice as the Lamb. Our need to be born again to his promise of eternal life. His power to heal and his promise to shepherd. The things he said and did were amazing.

But they only apply if we believe. (**John 20:31**) The very reason John *wrote* the book. *So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (ESV) Believe and live. That's the purpose. The reason he wrote it and the reason we're studying it.

And this passage is no different. In fact, it's a warning about *unbelief*. Several warnings in fact. Grave warnings. Prophetic warnings. Going all the way back to Isaiah, 725 years *before* Christ. Warnings to heed, that we might live.

John 12:36b – *When Jesus had said these things* [about being the light of the world and drawing all people to himself; on the eve of the Passover, in the heart of Jerusalem], *he departed and hid himself from them.*

Wait. What? He withdrew from them? He left them? He didn't stick around and keep trying to reach them? Keep talking to them? Keep serving them?

No. *He departed and hid himself*. Because some of them were trying to kill him and others didn't believe him. Like it says in v37 – *Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.* They rejected him. So, *he departed and hid himself*. He left.

All of which gives credence to moving on sometimes. Moving on from people, moving on from ministry, or moving on from jobs.

Don't be afraid to move on (v36b)

It's not the core of this passage; and it's more of an encouragement than a warning; but it's worth noting. Don't be afraid to move on. It's okay.

Not because you're tired of somebody, or frustrated; or because the grass is greener somewhere *else*; but because the people to whom you're ministering won't listen. They have no spiritual sensitivity and won't believe. Like those to whom Jesus was speaking. Don't be afraid.

But let me be quick to say I'm not talking about your marriage; just in case you're miserable and your *spouse* doesn't believe. This isn't a pass to get out of that. Nor am I talking about your parents because they don't approve of your lifestyle.

I'm talking about people and situations where the apples are perpetually green instead of ripe. People with whom you rub shoulders and do life, but want nothing to do with God. Like some of the people who have cut my hair over the years.

I've actually switched barbers because of their hardness of heart. Which cuts against my grain so much I agonize over it. When I find someone I like, I tend to stick with them.

But after trying to talk about the things of the Lord month in and month out, and receiving nothing back – no sign of spiritual sensitivity, no interest, and no engagement – I go somewhere else.

Time is short. People are dying. God is worthy. And I want to connect with those who are *interested*. I want to make the *most* of my days. Which means sometimes I move on. Just like Jesus did.

Unfortunately, some Christians go to the other extreme and tap out too early. Or leave when they shouldn't. Like pastors who leave churches prematurely. Or missionaries who leave the field too soon. Or friends who give up too easily. Sometimes we move on when we shouldn't.

But other times, it's okay. Sometimes, it's time. Just make sure it's for the right reasons, not the wrong ones. That's the first point. Don't be afraid to move on.

The second, comes the crux of the passage. The warnings.

[36b] When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. [37] Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, [38] so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" To whom has the power of God been revealed? The work of God. Who's seen it?

Not many. That's the implication. As John looked around, most people rejected Jesus. Most people followed the crowd; the ways of the world; false religions. Or in the case of the Jews, an incomplete religion. All of which left him asking, "Who believes?" Just like Isaiah did. Prophecy, fulfillment. Then *and* now.

But John doesn't recall it and record it just to enlighten us; just to manage our expectations and describe our culture. That's all true; but it also serves as a warning to make sure we don't do the same. A grave warning to say . . .

Don't be stubborn (v37-38)

When it comes to believing in Jesus, and the good news of what he's done for you, don't be stubborn. Don't keep ignoring God's *work* in the world. Don't keep turning a blind eye to all his *signs*. Refusing to even acknowledge them, let alone believe that he's behind them.

You say, "What work? What signs?" Well, for starters, the things he did while walking the earth. The signs to which John refers in v37 – *Though he had done so many signs before them* [miracles with a purpose], *they still did not believe in him.*

Signs like turning water into wine. Healing the man who was lame. Feeding the multitude. Walking on water. Raising Lazarus. And a whole bunch more in the other gospels. Not to mention his signs in the book of Acts. And countless more in the history of the church. Don't be stubborn. Don't keep ignoring them.

And don't be stubborn about believing the signs of God in *creation*; the wonder of the universe. From the observable proof that it had a beginning, requiring a creator, to the detailed and organized information in every strand of DNA. And the irreducible complexity of every cell. Don't be stubborn.

Or how about the work of God in your *life*? To give you breath in the first place. And bring you to this place. *Sparing* your life along the way. Blessing you with a family. Showering you with favor. Giving you a job. Don't be stubborn. Open your eyes and see.

And most of all, don't be stubborn about believing the work Jesus did for you on the *cross*. Dying for your sins and rising again; the sign of all signs.

Don't be counted among those who *still* don't believe in him; won't believe in him. Because you not only miss out, but it seals your fate. Your destiny. Your place in hell. Not to mention a *life* of hell until you get there. Full of misery, bitterness, and disappointment. A life of hopeless wondering. Helpless wandering. Self-absorbed hedonism. Angry fanaticism. Sexual regret. Nagging shame.

Is that you? If so, don't be stubborn. Don't be obstinate. Because the last thing you want is to be part of Isaiah's fulfillment in v38 – "*Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has [your arm] been revealed?*"

Instead of saying, "not me," along with the crowd; you want to be one of the few who says, "I have! I've seen, and I believe!" Don't be stubborn.

Third, and even more grave . . .

Don't flirt with disaster (v39-41)

That's the next warning. Don't flirt with the disaster of having your heart hardened by God himself. Not *contrary* to your will, but according to it. According to your stubborn unbelief. Persist in that, and God may very well make it permanent.

In other words, reject God by rejecting his Son, and you're flirtin' with the disaster of being rejected by *him*. The disaster of being *unable* to believe. It's true. Look at the flow of thought.

V37 says – *Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. . . . [39] Therefore [v39] they could not believe.* Do you see it? They *did not* believe, v37; and therefore *could not* believe; v39.

And then he gives the disastrous reason; the reason they couldn't believe. *For again Isaiah said, [40] "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."* That's disastrous. Gravely so.

And just to make sure we understand, John adds in v41 – *Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.* The glory of Jesus.

So when Isaiah had his vision of the throne in Isaiah 6, the chapter from which this quote comes, John says that Isaiah saw *Jesus* high and lifted up. And when Isaiah *recorded* this

quote from the throne room, John says he was *quoting* Jesus. [41] *Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.*

Put all that together, and John is saying this: Because they *did not* believe in Jesus, and *persisted* in their unbelief, they *could not* believe. Because in the *words* of Jesus, God *has blinded their eyes* [to keep them from seeing the *work* of Jesus] *and hardened their heart* [to the *love* of Jesus], *lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn* [or repent], *and [he] would heal them.* That's a disaster.

I sat in on the Lift Q&A last weekend for our students, and somebody asked why they shouldn't live however they want and do whatever they please while they're young, and just give their life to Christ when they're older. Why shouldn't they drink and be merry, and toe the line later?

First of all, there may not be a later; and if there is, you're flirtin' with disaster. Because there comes a time with some people when God has had it; and *won't* heal them; *won't* save them.

Like a doctor with a derelict patient who refuses to listen to him; and does the exact opposite of what he says. So that eventually the doctor says, "If that's the way you're going to live, you're on your own. You don't *want* my help, so I'm not going to give it."

If that's you, if you're a stubborn unbeliever, hear me on this: you're flirtin' with disaster. Because at some point in your unbelief, God may very well make the hardness of your heart permanent. He may actually *blind* you to the truth.

Is he longsuffering? Absolutely. Is he patient? Exceedingly. Does he give us chance upon chance to believe? Yes! But the implication of v40 is that it might not last. Not for those who reject him. Not for those who refuse to believe in him. Not for those who want nothing to do with him.

So flirt with disaster no more. Believe in Jesus right now. Turn to him this moment. Because though God's patience is higher than the sky and deeper than the sea, he won't extend it forever. It's a grave warning.

And last . . .

Don't be foolish (v42-43)

Don't be stubborn, don't flirt with disaster, and don't be foolish.

After implying that most people rejected Jesus, John says in v42 – *Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him* [most didn't but many did; then *and now*; praise God], *but for fear of the Pharisees* [the religious power brokers; and influencers] *they did not confess it* [they didn't confess their belief in Jesus], *so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; [43] for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*

They believed, but they didn't confess it. They kept it a secret. Like being a world-class athlete but never entering the Olympics. Or winning gold but never wearing it. Or having a candle but never lighting it. And if you do, always concealing it. Hiding it under a bushel.

Who does that? Nobody in their *right* mind. Because it's foolish. It's foolish to walk in darkness. It's foolish to conceal the light; especially the light of *life*; the light of the world. It's foolish not to run; or skate. It's foolish not to win.

Not only that, but **Romans 10:10** says – *For with the heart one believes and is justified [declared righteous], and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* Confesses, or declares openly, that Jesus is Lord of your life. Belief and confession go hand-in-hand. One without the other is incomplete.

So don't be foolish. Don't be foolish . . .

• **By failing to confess your belief openly (42a)**

That's the point. That's where the authorities in Jesus' day failed. *They did not confess it, v42.*

Which means it doesn't matter how serious you are about your faith, or how sincere, or how genuine, if you fail to confess it openly. No confession, no salvation. Because there's something about going public with your faith that makes it real.

Second, don't be foolish . . .

• **By fearing man's rejection more than God's (42b)**

V42b – *they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.* They hid their faith in *Jesus*, because they feared the rejection of *man*. They feared the loss of friends. And community. The loss of belonging to something.

Which one of us hasn't been guilty of *that* in the course of our life? Failing to confess Jesus and live openly for him, because we feared the consequences? Feared what people would say. Feared they would leave us; or push us away. We've *all* done it to some extent. And praise God he forgives when we repent.

But if that's your M.O., if hiding your belief and keeping it private is your norm, you've got a problem. (**Matthew 10:32-33**) Because Jesus said – [32] *So everyone who acknowledges me before men [openly confesses me here], I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, [33] but whoever denies me before men [silently or explicitly], I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

Don't go there. Don't be foolish. Who cares if you're rejected by your friends? Who cares if you're rejected by your family? Who cares if you're rejected by your co-workers? Better that than be rejected by God!

And last, don't be foolish . . .

• **By loving man's praise more than God's (43)**

Man's recognition. Man's applause. V43 says they withheld their confession – *for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.* The recognition of God. The praise of God. The favor of God.

Loving man's praise more than God's is like loving the attention of an ant, more than the attention of a crowd. The attention of a stranger more than a friend. The praise of the finite more than the Infinite.

How foolish. Let your light shine. Live openly. Seek the glory of God and the applause of heaven. Even if it means waiting for a lifetime. Because I guarantee, it lasts forever.

Summary

One encouragement, and three warnings. Don't be stubborn, don't be foolish, and by all means don't flirt with disaster.

Prayer – Lord, thank you for the truth of your word; even when it's hard to receive. Use it to save sinners and sanctify saints. Use it to soften hearts and break down walls. Use it to spur us on so that even more would believe and live. In Jesus' name, amen.

You Are Loved