

What it means to believe in Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now and read together in the Scriptures. We're in John's Gospel and chapter 12. And Edward Lobb is finishing the final of his little series in John 11 and 12.

And we're going to read together from the second half of verse 36, just under the heading there, the unbelief of the people in the church Bibles.

It's 899, page 899, if you have one of the red visitor's Bibles. And begin reading there at verse 36. When Jesus had said these things, he departed and he hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.

So that the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. Lord, who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

[1 : 06] Therefore they could not believe. For again, Isaiah said, Isaiah said, More than the glory that comes from God.

And Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me.

I have come into this world as light. So that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my word and does not keep them, I do not judge him.

For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

For I have not spoken on my own authority. But the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment. What to say and what to speak.

[2 : 42] And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless us. His word. Well, good evening, friends.

Good to see you all. Let's turn to our John's Gospel, chapter 12. And you'll find this on page 899 in our big hardback Bibles, if that's the one you have.

Page 899. Now, this is the last in our short series of sermons on the 11th and 12th chapters of John's Gospel. And I want to take for our passage this evening simply the short section at the end of chapter 12, which runs from verse 44 to verse 50.

Now, my guess is that this is one of the least known passages in the whole of John's Gospel. We're much more familiar with the great miracles or signs that Jesus performs and with the I am sayings and with that great final discourse, the upper room discourse, where Jesus in chapters 14 to 17 instructs the apostles about what is to happen after his departure.

[4 : 01] But this back end of chapter 12 is a bit of a Cinderella in the cellar. It's out of sight and out of mind, but it's a striking passage and it needs to be unearthed.

So let me give it a bit of context before we look at it. John's Gospel is a book in two halves. The first half is chapters 1 to 12, where John the Evangelist records the events of Jesus' three years of public ministry.

Then the second half of the Gospel is chapters 13 to 20. And those eight chapters deal with the events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Saturday, not much happens then, and then Easter Sunday.

Then chapter 21 is a kind of epilogue, which records an episode that happened a couple of weeks after Jesus had been raised from the dead. And it's mainly about the restoration and recommissioning of Simon Peter after his denials of Jesus.

So the first 12 chapters of the Gospel, the first half deal with three years, three years in the life of Jesus, his public ministry, his signs, his miracles, and his public teaching.

[5 : 12] Then the second half, eight chapters, chapters 13 to 20, deal with four days in his life, the most important four days in the history of the world.

The Thursday, the Friday, the Saturday, and Easter Sunday. And then we have the epilogue in chapter 21. So chapter 12 ends his public teaching ministry.

That teaching that he gives, very important teaching in the later chapters, is his private teaching given to the 11 in the upper room. So our section for tonight, verses 44 to 50, is his final word to the world.

You'll see in verse 44 that he cries out. It's as though he lifts his megaphone to his lips. And he uses that great John's Gospel word, whoever.

It's a bit like, if you have ears to hear, then listen. Whoever you are, listen. I'm calling out to the world, and I'm calling out with the urgent summons of the Gospel.

[6 : 15] So in this short section, we should understand that John is giving us a summary of the heart of Jesus' preaching. This is the heart of the message that Jesus gave to the world back in 30 AD, and it is still the heart of what he says to the world today.

It is unchanged. You could read the whole of Shakespeare with all his subtle understanding and wisdom, his great understanding of human nature.

And yet you would not find anything in Shakespeare to match the truth or the sheer urgent significance of these few verses in John chapter 12. Now the heart of this passage is not so much an invitation as a command.

It's a summons to believe in Jesus. Look at the opening phrase there in verse 44. Whoever believes in me, that person will find that certain great blessings follow.

believing in Jesus. That's the message at the heart of John's Gospel. John, you might say, is the world expert in belief and unbelief. We have a lot about unbelief too.

[7 : 21] Rather shocking to read the passage just before, verses 36 to 43, because it speaks of the way in which God himself, through Isaiah, has prophesied the rejection of the message of the Lord Jesus.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And even those who did become believers, many of them were frightened of the Pharisees and therefore were not prepared to declare it. So believing in Jesus, that's at the heart of this Gospel.

And believing in Jesus really means two things. First, the mind agrees. Second, the heart submits. The mind of the Christian comes to agree, to accept that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. And then the heart comes to submit to him. As Lord and Master.

Intellectual agreement and heart submission combine. And the Christian then serves the Lord Jesus with joy and is willing to stake his future on Jesus for this life and for eternity.

[8 : 24] There is nothing more radical than to become a Christian and then to live as a Christian. And when in verse 44 Jesus cries out to the world, whoever believes in me, it's this combination of intellectual agreement and heart submission that he's talking about.

And what he says in the next few verses opens up for us what it means to believe in him. That's my title for tonight. What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

So we'll look at this little passage under three main headings. First, Jesus is saying that to believe in him is to believe in God the Father.

This is what verse 44 is all about. He cries out and says, whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. In other words, if you believe in me, you inevitably and necessarily believe in the Father who sent me.

The identity of Jesus and the identity of God the Father are so closely bound up together that to believe in the Son inevitably entails believing in the Father.

[9 : 35] You can't have one without the other. One of the great themes, one of the big themes of John's Gospel is that Jesus reveals the Father, the real nature of the Father.

There is only one God, only one true God and Jesus exactly reveals his nature to the human race. Now this point comes out beautifully in chapter 14.

You might just like to flick over to chapter 14 and verses 8 and 9. And you'll see in verse 8, Philip, who's one of the 11 apostles, the 11 remaining apostles, says to Jesus, Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us.

Show us the Father and we shall be satisfied. That's another way of putting it. And there, Peter is expressing the heart cry of the human race. What is God like?

We want to be shown the true nature of God. So look at Jesus' reply to Philip in verse 9. It's a gentle and almost teasing rebuke.

[10:39] Philip, he says, have I been with you all this time and still you don't know me? Still do you not understand who I am? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

Now, he's not saying to Philip, I am the Father. Not for a moment. He always very carefully distinguishes his person from the person of God the Father.

But what he's saying here is that his nature, his character, his very being expresses exactly the nature and character of the Father. To put it at its simplest, he and the Father are one in nature, but distinct in person.

Like Father, like Son. Now, doesn't that answer a very important contemporary question?

A question that so many people are thinking about. The question of who God is. Is this? Is this? Just imagine a typical lively young adult today who's full of curiosity, genuine curiosity about the truth.

[11:46] And this person begins to study the religions of the world. He or she says, how interesting all these different religions are. As I begin to study them, I can see that they're deeply tied up with ancient and fascinating civilizations.

But they give such varied accounts of what the deity is really like. I'm discovering monotheism, polytheism, pantheism. In some cultures, we have the veneration of the ancestors.

In some, we have the veneration of animals. Oh, elephant, your trunk is a wonder of the world, for example. We even have atheistic religions like Buddhism. So where does one begin?

How can a modern student like me begin to search for the true God? These religions can't all be true because the accounts they give of God are so contradictory. So I'll tell you what I'll do.

I'll go exploring the world in my search for the true God. I'll visit the Buddhist monasteries of Tibet and Burma. I'll discuss Confucius with Chinese scholars.

[12:51] I'll visit the river Ganges and I'll observe the rituals of Hinduism as they cremate their dead and let the remains float down the river. I'll go to Mecca and I'll study Islam. I'll even go to the great cathedrals of Britain and Europe and contemplate their vaulted Gothic arches and pray for a revelation of the divine.

Now you could spend 10 years of your life running around the world like that and still not end up any the wiser. A lot of modern people are like that.

Forever restless until they come to rest in a verse like our verse 44. The one who believes in Jesus comes to know the one who sent him.

Comes to know the true character of God the Father, the one God. to know Jesus is to know God because Jesus exactly represents him. And the same point is being made in verse 45 as well.

And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. To see Jesus is to see the Father. Now obviously we today can't see him in the way that his original hearers were able to see him.

[14:02] But we're at no disadvantage. We can be confident that he looked just like any other young Jewish man with the dark hair and coloring and features of the typical Jew.

But it's not his physical appearance which is important. It's his character, his ways, his nature. We learn in the pages of the Gospels about his truthfulness, his love, his honesty, his psychological balance and sanity, his unerring judgment of character, his hatred of hypocrisy and false religion.

And we see him also beginning to do the work of God to gather his church around him. He gathers the apostles so that they in turn should then begin to gather other people.

The process of evangelism is a process of gathering. It's God's work. It's what he does. Jesus is putting into motion the work of the Father as he calls men and women from all over the world to follow him.

So to see Jesus at work is to see the Father at work. And then we see Jesus revealing his thinking, his mind in his teaching and preaching in the four Gospels.

[15:14] And the mind of Jesus again is the mind of God the Father. The people noticed that as he opened his mouth to teach, he taught with authority, quite unlike the teaching that they were accustomed to hearing from their scribes and Pharisees.

to hear Jesus preaching was to hear God preaching about himself. So we don't have to go to Tibet or Mecca or Beijing to find the true God.

All we have to do is to open our Bibles and think carefully and unhurriedly about Jesus. And we shall come to know the true God as he really is. To believe in Jesus is to believe in the one who sent him.

To listen to Jesus is to listen to God the Father. Look on to verse 50. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

My words are his words. Jesus claims no originality for his teaching there. His claim in verse 50 is that his teaching is a perfect reproduction and representation of God the Father's words.

[16:24] So friends, don't go to Tibet unless you want to climb Mount Everest or discover the abominable snowman. But don't go there to find God. You will find him, the one true God, as you discover Jesus in the pages of the Bible.

Now there's another feature of our passage which makes the same point in a slightly different way. Just look at the last four words of verse 44. Him who sent me.

And then look at the last four words of verse 45. Him who sent me. It's a very John's Gospel phrase in the mouth of Jesus as he speaks about God the Father.

Now the idea of God sending Jesus or him who sent me, that occurs about once each in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But it comes time and again in John.

It's part of the vocabulary that Jesus uses to describe himself. I am the one whom God the Father has sent. And he usually uses that phrase when he's talking to his opponents in the Jewish establishment.

[17:30] And the reason is this. They were criticizing him in many ways but particularly for being a self-styled maverick teacher as they thought. At one point in John's Gospel they say, where has this man come from?

Chapter 7. And somebody says, Galilee. And they say, well search the Scriptures. You'll find that no prophet comes from Galilee. But Jesus' point to his critics is that he has a better origin than Galilee.

He has come from heaven. He's not come of his own accord. He has been sent by God the Father. So that phrase, him who sent me, makes the point that Jesus is authorized and authenticated not by any human authority but by God the Father.

He is the Father's son, the Father's mouthpiece, the Father's missionary, the Father's representative and the Father's exact representation. To see him is to see the Father.

To believe in him is to believe in the Father. To know him is to know the Father. Let's beware, therefore, of thinking of Jesus as a diluted, watered-down version of God.

[18:43] Yes, he is the Son and the Father is the Father but Jesus is God. He's fully God. When we meet him finally, therefore, it will not be to shake his hand or to put an arm around his shoulder.

It will be to fall down before him and to worship him. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God the Father. Then second, to believe in Jesus is to live in the light.

Look at verse 46. I've come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. Now, there's a very interesting feature to that particular verse.

It's one of maybe 10 or 12 verses in the New Testament which tell us why Jesus came into the world. Now, they're all different. Some of these verses explaining why he came come from Jesus' own mouth like this one.

Or like John chapter 10 verse 10. I came that men might have life and have it abundantly. Or another famous one from the mouth of Jesus comes in Luke chapter 19 where Jesus is discussing his mission with Zacchaeus.

[19:56] And he says to Zacchaeus, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. But some of these sayings talking about why Jesus came come from the apostles.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy chapter 1, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. John, in his first letter, chapter 3, writes this, the reason the Son of God came into the world was to destroy the works of the devil.

You could have a very profitable hour or two reading and thinking about those 10 or 12 verses which speak of why Jesus came. So let's look at this one in verse 46. I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.

Now there's an unmistakable implication here and that is that all people are by birth and nature in the darkness. The one who believes in Jesus does not remain in the darkness.

But the implication is that we all start there. darkness in John's gospel is always the darkness of sin and death and moral rottenness. Right from our youngest days you and I have known how to misbehave.

[21 : 17] Nobody had to teach you how to tell a lie did they? You knew how to do it. Nobody had to teach me how to covet things and steal. For example when I was at primary school age six I stole a shiny key fob enameled with a picture of a Renault car on it.

A little boy had hung it up on the hedge during break time milk break you know eleven o'clock and I nicked it. It belonged to my school friend Miles Davis. I don't think I ever gave it back to him.

I was simply too guilty and too ashamed of what I'd done. Miles if you're out there in cyberspace anywhere listening to my talk it was me it was Edward Lobb please forgive me.

I haven't got it so I can't give it back to him. Now we're all by nature like that aren't we? We've all done that kind of thing and much more. Our parents spent twenty years trying to teach us how to behave well.

They didn't have to spend five minutes teaching us to behave badly. The darkness is our native repulsive element. It's made up of greed envy pride lust vanity self-centeredness anger violence lying several other things.

[22 : 33] We are sinners by nature and the wages of sin is death. But the good news in verse 46 is that Jesus came into the world as light so as to rescue us from the tyranny of darkness and from the ultimate destiny of those who remain in darkness which is hell.

So to believe in Jesus is to live in the light. Now what does that mean? Well Jesus puts it more fully in John's Gospel chapter 8 verse 12 where he says I am the light of the world he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

It's about being able to see where we're going. Think of it like this at night time if you walk into a dark room in your house you then switch on the light.

Why? So as to see what's in the room. The light enables you to do what you need to do in that room to find a book or to make a phone call or write a birthday card or whatever.

Now you can do those activities quickly and confidently because the light enables you to see everything. But if you go into a dark room and for some reason the light is not working you're at a great disadvantage.

[23 : 52] You're like a blind person. You're likely to fall over a chair trip over the dog which you haven't seen lying on the rug. The turning on of the light enables you to see clearly so that you can act confidently and properly.

And what Jesus means in our verse 46 is that when we trust in him it's as though a great light begins to shine on the road that we're walking along.

we begin to see our way clearly so that we can act confidently and wisely. We begin to see the obstacles and dangers and hindrances that need to be avoided.

Because light is now shining on our pathway we begin to distinguish true and good things from false and deceitful things. We leave behind moral blindness and become increasingly morally cited.

Now of course it doesn't all happen immediately. Dawn creeps slowly over the land. But when we've been on the road of trusting Christ for some time we discover the joy of being able to see clearly where we're walking.

[25 : 00] We begin to understand the Ten Commandments and to love them. In years gone by perhaps they seemed like something threatening and joyless with their negatives as they seem to us.

But we begin to see that they are a glorious description of the happy and wholesome life. The moral confusion and despair and muddle in which we once lived is driven away increasingly.

Now if you look back in our chapter to verse 36 you'll see how Jesus adds another phrase which helps us to grasp his meaning. While you have the light believe in the light that you may become sons of light.

Now think of that phrase sons of light. In the Bible to be a son of something is to share its very nature. So for example Barnabas the Apostle Barnabas is called in the Acts of the Apostles a son of encouragement.

No doubt because he was consistently a very encouraging person to be with. James and John the sons of Zebedee were nicknamed by Jesus Boanerges sons of thunder.

[26 : 07] I imagine because they were a very noisy pair of young men. and you and I become sons of light through believing in the light and learning to walk in the light. The light begins to penetrate the natural darkness of our natures and it begins to shape to reshape our natures.

If we ask is it really possible for human nature to change? The answer is yes indeed wonderfully possible wonderfully Look around you at your fellow Christians Look especially at those who've been walking with Christ for many years The living roots of sin remain with us They can never be fully eradicated this side of glory but the Lord Jesus is our light and he tells us in no uncertain terms in verse 46 that the reason he came into the world was that whoever believes in him should not remain in darkness Friend if you're wrestling with the darkness of your own heart at this moment stick with Jesus You won't be disappointed So to believe in Jesus is first to believe in God the Father and secondly to live in the light Now we're coming to the third thing in just a moment but before we get there

Jesus interjects a sharp and sobering message to the the person who is listening to him but is inclined to dismiss his message Just imagine somebody standing in the crowd back then in 30 AD listening to Jesus perhaps being drawn to Jesus but in his thinking about Jesus he suddenly pauses and he begins to weigh everything up and maybe he says to himself if I follow Jesus I'm beginning to realize it'll be costly I'm going to have to repent of various things and I'm not sure that I want to repent of them for example I'm going to have to be honest with Her Majesty's revenue and customs that's going to reduce that's going to reduce my income and I'm going to have to stop flirting with that pretty young married woman who works close to me in the office and I'm not sure I want to stop flirting with her and maybe he thinks of half a dozen other things that are going to have to change and eventually he says

I can't do it it's too demanding I won't do it I'll drop this scheme of following Jesus I'll invent some excuse now it's to this kind of person that Jesus speaks in verse 47 if anyone hears my words and does not keep them in other words does not respond to the gospel I do not judge him for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world the one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge the word that I've spoken will judge him on the last day in other words on the last day the great day of judgment God the Father will say to this man did you not hear the message of Jesus and the man will say yes I did hear it and God will say but why did you not believe it and the man will say because I didn't want to give up fraudulent accounting and I wanted that pretty woman and God will say you rejected Jesus and his glorious message for those reasons and the man will say yes I did and God will reply the message of Jesus stands witness against you this day you come under judgment because you heard the summons to eternal life but you despised it if anybody here is in the position of that man hearing the message but wanting to reject it because it demands repentance and change be warned and be wise in the end to turn away from Christ is not just to embrace sin it's to embrace death we cannot afford to trifle with the Son of God now this brings us straight to the third thing which the Lord Jesus holds out to the believer verse 49 for I have not spoken on my own authority but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment what to say and what to speak and I know that his commandment is eternal life what I say therefore I say as the Father has told me so here's the third thing to believe in Jesus is to obey the commandment of eternal life now isn't that a striking way for Jesus to end his public ministry he disclaims any idea that his teaching originates in himself there's a remarkable humility in him what I say is what the Father has told me to say at one level it's not my message it's his but the most striking thing is the word that Jesus uses in verse 49 and again in verse 50 the word commandment the Father has given me a commandment he's not simply advised me what to say he has commanded me what to say and what to speak and verse 50 what is this commandment it is eternal life now it's so unexpected that he should call it a commandment you might expect him to say

[31 : 47] I'm offering you eternal life or I'm promising you eternal life or I'm holding out the prospect of eternal life to you but he says instead eternal life is the commandment of God the Father to everyone who has ears to hear it could anything be stronger than a command from heaven to receive eternal life why does God need to command us to accept eternal life it's because of the intractable resistant nature of our hearts we persuade ourselves we deceive ourselves that a life of self-rule and self-pleasing will bring us sweetness and joy but that road is the road to destruction God commands us to receive eternal life why because he cares about us it's not his will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and that all of us should know the sweetness and joy of being with him being forgiven and being finally with the Lord Jesus in the glorious new creation

God commands each of us not to perish but to receive eternal life by putting our trust in his son Jesus with the agreement of the mind and with the submission of the heart his commandment says Jesus is eternal life well let's bow our heads and we'll pray our dear Lord Jesus we thank you that you have received this commandment from your father and that you pass it on to us and we know that your love your tender mercy and care for us lies behind this great summons we dare not refuse it we dare not turn away bless us therefore give us the courage to follow you whatever it might cost us and help us both individually and as a congregation and as a worldwide church to live out the implications of the gospel so that many may come to you and live and we ask it for your dear name's sake
Amen