

Congregational handout; outline sermon text on following pages

## Sermon Notes & References

### Why Men Reject Jesus John 12:36-43

October 23, 2016

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<sup>A</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7; John 6:15; Matthew 20:20-21; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Acts 1:6

<sup>B</sup> Isaiah 6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Revelation 20:2-3; Romans 11:8; Exodus 7:3, 8:32, 9:12

<sup>C</sup> John 19:38-39

A. Introduction

1. Witnessing to an Atheist

- a. Celeste Holwick is a registered nurse works the "graveyard shift" at Dover Hospital. This particular night was busy because the staffing was thin. Celeste took one side of a floor, and a nurse she did not know took the other side. Being the kind of person she is, Celeste finished nursing her patients, and went over to help the other nurse. She was flabbergasted – almost no other nurse did this!
- b. She turned to Celeste and asked, "Celeste Holwick - are you that preacher's wife I've heard about?" "Yes, that's me." "Oh. Are you one of those born-again types? My brother became one a few years ago."
- c. Celeste went on to explain how she viewed being born again. It is something that God does for us. The nurse had a quizzical look on her face, then said, "I'm not a born-again type. I'm an atheist."
- d. Celeste wasn't sure how to respond to this, and soon the patients began ringing them. All night long Celeste wondered if she should have been more forceful with her co-worker. But in the morning the nurse came up to her again.
- e. "You're not like the other born-again people I know. All my brother's friends are born-againers, and when I told them I was an atheist, they came over and pounded me with their Bibles. You really seem to be different."
- f. Celeste IS a special kind of person. But every Christian has an obligation to share the gospel. It's not just our words, because they want to see some evidence in us. But once they see the evidence, we have to tell them why we are this way. If something real has happened to you, and you really care, you have to share. <sup>-{2}</sup>.

2. Sharing Is Difficult

- a. people will talk in generalities about God, about religion, but when you start to talk about loving Jesus, about salvation, about the cross they start to shy away
- b. "God" is a vague term; but Jesus is specific; moreover His claim to salvation is exclusive – "for there is no other name under heaven"
- c. and in this day where every opinion demands and is accorded a right to its own expression – the religion of tolerance – except Christianity and attempts to give a testimony to Christ are met with coldness
- d. but the passage that we are looking at today tells us that it has ever been so and that we should not give up

B. Rejected by Deluded Minds . . . . . John 12:37-38

- 1. **37** But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; **38** that the word

of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

2. This Jesus was not the Messiah they expected nor desired
  - a. they expected a king of the earthly kind, and that was the reason for the grand procession into the city on the first day of the week with people waving palm branches and shouting "Hossana, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel."
  - b. they expected the Messiah described in Isaiah 9:6-7, "6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:6-795)
  - c. a powerful king, victorious, providing them with material blessing
    - (A) at the feeding of the 5,000 they thought they had found him
    - (B) but Jesus' kingdom was of a different order and degree
    - (C) "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone." (John 6:15)
  - d. even the disciples were not free of this idea after over three years of sitting under his ministry,
    - (A) 20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She \*said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." (Matthew 20:20-21)
    - (B) James & John there with her vied for that privilege
    - (C) and the other ten disciples became indignant with them
3. But Isaiah had likewise suffered after years of ministry
  - a. These words, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" are a free rendition of Isaiah 53:1
  - b. what was Isaiah's report? what His then description of Messiah?
  - c. let us go back to Isaiah 52:13 and read it
    - (A) "Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted." (Isaiah 52:13)
    - (B) but what follows this?
    - (C) v 14 – his appearance marred

- (D) v 15 – sprinkling many nations – the atonement
- (E) 53:2 – no regal splendour
- (F) 53:3 – rather rejected of men
- (G) 53:4-6 – a spiritual, not a political Saviour
- (H) 53:7-9 – condemned, executed, buried

- d. “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”
- e. even after the resurrection: “[And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”](#)” (Acts 1:6)
- f. the Jews, even the disciples, having heard His message, His report; having seen His signs, the arm of the Lord revealed, did not understand – it would take the Holy Spirit’s work to bring faith to maturity

4. For the same reason Jesus is rejected today

- a. people desire a kindly, loving god who enfolds everyone to himself regardless of their lives, actions, beliefs
- b. in this they are deluded as were the Jewish people
- c. for Jesus Christ reveals
  - (A) not only a God of love
  - (B) but one who is ineffably holy, pure, majestic, righteous
  - (C) who cannot tolerate sin in His presence
  - (D) and whose wrath must be exercised upon the rebel sinner
- d. Jesus Himself, on the cross, graphically depicts that wrath
  - (A) bearing the awful punishment of our sin
  - (B) and proud mankind cannot accept this truth & receive Christ

C. Rejected by Dulled Minds . . . . . John 12:39-41

- 1. [39 For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 40 “He has blinded their eyes, and he hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them.” 41 These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.](#)
- 2. Who is the “He” that has blinded their eyes?
  - a. certainly the passage in Isaiah, of which this is a free translation, does not answer the question, for there the words are a command, forecasting the effect of Isaiah’s ministry: “[9 And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’ 10 Render the hearts of this](#)

people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Lest they see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:9-10)

- b. So in this place, the word “He” has been understood a number of ways
- c. first, it can be seen as the action of Satan
  - (A) “3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)
  - (B) which can readily be seen as a fact, for it is the sin that the devil introduced to the human race that has brought its continued rebellion against God, for which cause it is written of him
  - (C) “2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.” (Revelation 20:2-3)
- d. or, secondly, the Greek could equally well be translated “It” and refer to the ministry of Isaiah, Jeremiah, the prophets, and Jesus Himself
  - (A) a ministry teaching that promised and then fulfilled the Messianic office of Jesus as the Prophet promised by Moses
  - (B) that ministry – the word of the gospel in its OT foreshadowing and its NT expression – had gone on for centuries preparing for Jesus coming and testifying to its arrival in the Son of God
  - (C) but the gospel message did not soften men’s hearts towards God, but rather as they sloughed it off, they became Gospel-hardened
- e. or, thirdly, considering what Paul has to say from a similar passage in Isaiah 29:10, relating to the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah: “just as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day.” (Romans 11:8)
  - (A) that the “He” in verse 40 is the same as the “His” and the “Him” in verse 41
  - (B) that as the ultimate sovereign mover of all events, it was God that brought this blindness upon Israel in particular, and unbelieving mankind
  - (C) but this was not done to exclude them from faith as can be seen by the pleading tone in those words, “and be converted, and I heal them”
  - (D) rather here is a very dire warning that those who repeatedly refuse the gospel and its gracious invitation, hardening their hearts, have their hearts hardened by God, so that in the words of verse 39, which mean just what they say, “they could not believe”

- (E) Calvin: "In this passage he speaks of the hardness by which God punishes the wickedness of an ungrateful people."
- (F) nowhere is this fact about God evidenced more clearly than in God's dealing with Pharaoh of Egypt:
  - (1) in His foreknowledge God said: "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 7:3)
  - (2) of Pharaoh in the freedom of his own will we read, "But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go." (Exodus 8:32)
  - (3) so finally it is said, "And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses." (Exodus 9:12)
- f. So in these three interpretations, we actually find three stages in which men and women reject Jesus
  - (A) the spiritual blindness that we inherit because of Adam's sin
  - (B) the growing hardness as the gospel invitation is often refused
  - (C) the judicial hardening of hearts by a righteous God
- g. The unbelief of these Jews, both the religious rulers and the majority of the people, had reached such a point that if, in response to their asking for a sign, Jesus had called down fire from heaven to destroy the temple, they would have crucified Him for arson and sacrilege.

3. In view of this, what then is to be done?

- a. is the child of God just to give up and say "it's no use"?
- b. to answer that question, let us go back to Isaiah 6 which is the passage to which John is here making reference: "In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple." (Isaiah 6:1 NAS)
- c. there Isaiah is told that his ministry – as also the ministry of Jesus Christ – would bring hardness of heart and unbelief to the majority of the Jewish nation
  - (A) so that a century after Isaiah, Judah went into captivity, so that punishment would soften their hearts to return to God
  - (B) so that forty years after Christ' death and resurrection, destruction and dispersion would come upon the Jewish people until such time comes foretold in Zechariah 12:10 – "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born." (Zechariah 12:10 NAS)
- d. when Isaiah heard what was going to be the result of his ministry – failure to understand, inability to see the

truth, deafness to God's word, he cries out: "Lord, how long?"

- e. How long are we to witness to a world that will not listen?
- f. Here is God's answer to Isaiah: `11b And He answered, "Until cities are devastated [and] without inhabitant, Houses are without people, And the land is utterly desolate, 12 The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. 13a "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, ..." (Isaiah 6:11-13 NAS)
- g. the work of the gospel is to continue regardless of visible results, for the Lord has yet those who will be saved.

D. Rejected by Earthly Minds . . . . . John 12:42-43

- 1. 42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.
  
- 2. just a few words on these verses
  - a. there were some who believed ... a word of encouragement
  - b. there were those who were truly disciples like Nicodemus & Joseph of Arimathea – "but secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38-39)
  - c. but others it was merely intellectual
    - (A) Oh, yes, He worked miracles.
    - (B) Oh, yes, He taught as did no other.
    - (C) Oh, yes, He was born by the Holy Spirit of the virgin, Mary.
    - (D) To believe these historical truths exacts no great expense.
    - (E) But, to order their lives according to His teaching – the essence of faith – they are unwilling, unwilling to obey Him unquestioningly
  
- 3. so men today may be religious, may even claim Christianity as their form of religion – be able to recite the creed, answer questions of Bible fact
  - a. but to confess themselves as sinners in need of a Saviour
  - b. to be associated with fervent, evangelical Christianity
  - c. No! For this would bring them into unwelcome associations
  - d. to be sneered at as one of those "born-againers"

## E. Conclusion

### 1. "Is This Vile World a Friend to Grace"

- a. we sang a few Sundays ago
- b. the answer to that question we have seen today is "No!"
- c. but the author goes on with this commitment

Sure I must fight if I would reign —

Increase my courage, Lord!

I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,

Supported by Thy Word. <sup>-{3}</sup>.

- d. of our own strength we can do nothing
- e. but let us seek to be channels through whom Jesus Christ can work by His Holy Spirit those who now reject the Author of eternal life



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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NLT	New Living Translation © 1996 Tyndale Charitable Trust
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 National Council of Churches of Christ
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- Bruce – *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, by F. F. Bruce, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; 1983
- BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, MI:  
*John*, by Merrill C. Tenney
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, [www.holwick.com](http://www.holwick.com).
- NICNT – *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*  
*The Gospel according to John*, by Leon Morris
- NTC – *New Testament Commentary*, by William Hendriksen; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 1954
- RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
- TTBC – Thru the Bible Commentary Series, by J. Vernon McGee; John 11-21; Thomas Nelson Publishers; 1991

2. ‘*Witnessing By Going the Extra Mile*’ – Kerux illustrations #2609

3. ‘*Am I a Soldier of the Cross?*’ by Isaac Watts (1674-1748)