JOHN 12

Joh 12:1  Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

Joh 12:2  So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table.

* In John 12, we find ourselves 6 days out from the Passover Feast.
  + This would have been March/April timeframe.
  + This was going to be Jesus’ last Passover on earth.
* Note, we are right in the middle of John’s gospel but we are already in the last 1-2 weeks of before Jesus’ death.
* Jesus came to Bethany were a dinner was prepared for Him.
  + Martha was serving.
  + Lazarus, who had recently been brought back to life, was at the table with Jesus.
  + What about Mary?

Joh 12:3  Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

* Mark’s gospel describes the scene this way.
  + Mar 14:3  And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.
* Matthew’s gospel describes the scene this way.
  + Mat 26:7  a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table.
* Jesus was in the house of Simon the Leper.
  + He also lived in Bethany and probably knew Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (it wasn’t a huge place).
  + We don’t have a lot of information about “Simon the leper” but it is almost certain he was a man healed by Jesus (otherwise no one would have eaten in his house).
* Mary appears in the scene with a very expensive box of ointment.
  + Mark tells us the box was alabaster.
  + What is alabaster?
    - Alabaster is a light colored semi-translucent stone which as been used in carvings and pottery for 1,000s of years.
    - Alabaster is semi-soluble in water and is almost exclusively used for indoor vessels and art.
    - 
    - 
    -  (Alabaster perfume bottle from the tomb of King Tut)
  + What was in the box?
    - John tells us it was pure nard.
    - This is likely a reference to spikenard.
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    - Spikenard grows in the Himalayas.
    - It is found at altitudes between 9,800–16,400 ft.
    - The difficulty of harvesting it and the cost of importing it all would have contributed to its value.
    - In Song of Solomon, nard was worn as a perfume. (SS 1:12)
  + The combination of the fancy vessel and the imported perfume made this a very expensive package.
* Mary took the ointment and poured it on Jesus head (per Mark) and washed His feet with her hair while He was at the table.
  + If someone poured smelly liquid on my head at a dinner party, I would probably be offended.
  + But in the ancient Jewish culture this wasn’t disrespectful or out of place.
  + Remember Psalm 23.
    - David says God anointed his head with oil at the table.
    - Psa 23:5 - You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
  + You may remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 6 about fasting.
    - Mat 6:16-18 - “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
    - Putting oil on your head was to make a person “look presentable,” like they had gotten out of bed and actually cared about the way they looked.
* If I understand correctly, this oil was worn in the hair to give the wearer a pleasant aroma (not much different than today’s scented shampoo).
* The anointing of Christ by this woman was definitely a step above normal.
* Why did she wash Jesus’ feet with her hair?
  + Back in those days, roads weren’t paved.
  + The roads were made from dirt and could be very dusty.
  + It was typical for a wealthy home owner to have a servant at the door to wash their feet and the feet of their guests when entering the house.
  + So when Mary washed Jesus’ feet with her hair, she was making it known that she was Jesus’ servant.
  + She humbled herself and honored Him.
  + We will see Jesus using this same imagery to teach His Apostles about being a servant in the upcoming chapters.

Joh 12:4  But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said,

Joh 12:5  “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

Joh 12:6  He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

* One of the important revelations of this texts is the true character of Judas Iscariot, on of Jesus’ 12 Apostles.
* Judas protested to what had just happened.
  + He suggested the expensive ointment should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor.
  + John tells us he said this “not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

Joh 12:7  Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

Joh 12:8  For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

* Let me also include Jesus’ words as recorded in Mark.
  + Mar 14:6 But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.
  + Mar 14:7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me.
  + Mar 14:8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.
  + Mar 14:9 And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”
* Rather than rebuking the women for her neglect of the poor, Jesus rebukes the disciples.
* This woman had taken a unique opportunity to honor God.
* A miniscule percentage of human beings had the privilege of seeing the Son of Man face-to-face and the woman responded in a way fitting to her privilege.
* The poor had been present from the beginning of time and will be present to the end of time but this was a unique moment worthy of being marked at any expense.
* Jesus makes two statements which reiterated to the disciples Jesus’ near future.
  + (1) “But you do not always have me.”
    - Jesus would be leaving them soon.
    - First, to go to the cross.
    - Second, to return to His Father in Heaven.
  + (2) Jesus tells the Apostles the ointment was for His burial.
    - Surprisingly, I find the words of verse 7 clearer in the KJV than the ESV.
      * KJV Joh 12:7  Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.
    - Jesus informed those observing the scene that the ointment shouldn’t be taken from the woman and sold, she should be allowed to keep it and do with it as she wished because it is intended for His burial.
    - Mark 14:8 “…she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.”
    - It is not clear how much the woman knew.
    - She may have listened to Jesus’ teachings and concluded His death was near.
    - Or it may be that Jesus took her actions and applied this construction to them to use it as an opportunity to teach His disciples about His passion.
* No matter her comprehension, her actions were a beautiful display of her faith and the value she ascribed to her relationship with Jesus.
* In Mark 14:9, Jesus makes an incredible statement about the woman’s act, He says, “And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

Joh 12:9  When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

Joh 12:10  So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,

Joh 12:11  because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

* Naturally, there was a significant amount of curiosity about two of the dinner guests in Simon’s house that day.
  + Jesus, who had the power to raise dead people.
  + Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead.
* When word got around that they were at Simon’s place, a large crowd started to gather.
* So, what do the Jewish authorities decide to do?
  + You might think they would consider believing after seeing a dead man raised.
  + Nope, they decide Lazarus needs to die too.
  + Why?
  + Because Lazarus is a walking talking miracle and on account of him many Jews believed in Jesus.
* In some ways this is humorous and in some ways it’s just sad.
  + How dense do you have to be to resist a man who can raise the dead?
  + And how silly is it to devise a plan to kill a man who was already dead once and was brought back to life by the person they were pitting themselves against.
* Earlier in the book, Jesus verbally confirmed He could lay His life down and then take it up again.
* He has now proved He can raise the dead.
* Should the Jewish authorities have been all that surprised when Jesus’ body came up missing three days after they killed Him?
* If they had been dealing with any other man, murder would have gotten the job done, but not with Jesus.
* APPLICATION:
  + Justifying evil as a means to an end almost always leads you down the path of justifying more evil than you originally intended.
    - Remember what Caiaphas said in the last chapter?
    - “…it is better for you that **one** man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:50).
    - Now they’re got **two** men on their hitlist.
  + The same is true when we justify evil.
    - We often have to justify additional evil to get ourselves out of the original situation.
    - Once we’ve justified evil once, it becomes easier to do it again.

Joh 12:12  The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

* It is important to recognize these events takes place at the beginning of the last week of Jesus’ life.
* And the events of the next few chapters all take place in Christ’s last week leading up to His death.

Joh 12:13  So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

Joh 12:14  And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

Joh 12:15  “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!”

* Jesus entered the city knowing He would receive a king’s welcome but without the personal pride of other kings.
  + Christ was entering their city as a king but a king clothed in humility.
  + He was their King, but He would also play the lowly role of being their sacrifice.
  + The voices that glorified Him as He entered the city would soon curse Him as He was led out of the city to His death.
* It is interesting to contrast Jesus’ appearance on a donkey in Jerusalem to His appearance on a white horse in Revelation.
* Matthew’s gospel tells us, along with the palm branches, people laid their clothing in the street.
* If we look back to the story of Jehu in 2 Kings 9:13 it reveals the practice of laying clothing on the ground was something done for royalty.
* The crowds surrounding Jesus were all shouting a term we haven’t encountered yet, “Hosanna.”
  + If my research is correct, the word translated “hosanna” comes from the Hebrew term “Hoshia-na” (yasha’na), meaning “please save.”
  + Although originally a cry for help, the people now used the phrase as a statement of praise for help arriving.
    - Psa 118:25-26 - Save (yasha) us (‘na), we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.
    - Mat 21:9 - And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”
    - We already know the Jews associated the term “Son of David” with the Messiah.
  + The people appear to have connected the dots. Their prayer of “save us” was being answered by the One who came in the name of the LORD, Jesus, who was the Son of David and the King of Israel.
* I don’t know about you, but when I think about a King, I typically envision him riding a mighty steed, not a donkey.
* Why did Jesus choose a donkey?
* Because Jesus wasn’t a king like most kings!
  + He was humble and His animal communicated something different than the pride of most earthly kings.
  + The prophecy cited in verse 15 is from Zechariah 9:9
* Donkey facts:
  + Colt: Male donkey under 4 years old.
  + Filly: Female donkey under 4 years old.
  + Foal: Baby male or female donkey under 1 year old.
  + Gelding: Castrated male donkey.
  + Stallion: Uncastrated male donkey.
  + Yearling: Male or female donkey between 1 and 2 years old.

Joh 12:16  His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

* While these things were happening, the disciples didn’t recognize the significance.
* They didn’t realize all Jesus was accomplishing and fulfilling (Old Testament prophecy) as He entered the city and did it in the specific way He chose to do it.
* But following Jesus’ ascension back into heaven, the pieces began falling into place for them as they had more time to look back at the complete picture of Jesus’ work and had help from the Holy Spirit.

Joh 12:17  The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.

Joh 12:18  The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

Joh 12:19  So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”

* There were many among the crowd who had been with Jesus when He raised Lazarus from the dead and they were telling the people of Jerusalem about what they had seen.
* The news of Lazarus’ resurrection was part of the reason so many people met Jesus as He entered the city.
* Jesus already had a reputation in Jerusalem but the miracle in Bethany got the people really excited.
* Humorously, the Pharisees are just distraught.
  + They had tried everything to silence Jesus.
  + They had tried every tactic and angle they could think of (sometimes more than once) and the result was the ever increasing popularity of the man they hated most.

Joh 12:20  Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

Joh 12:21  So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

Joh 12:22  Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

* Who were these “Greeks”?
* A couple theories exist:
  + They were Jews who had adopted Greek customs and probably spoke Greek. We know there were Jews spread out all over the world at this time, many in heavily Greek influenced areas.
  + They were gentiles (non-Jews) converts to the Jewish religion (also known as propylites).
  + They were pagan gentiles who didn’t ascribe exclusively to the Jewish faith but who came to give an offering and participate in the feast to honor God as one god among many.
* If I had to guess, I would guess these were gentiles who had heard about Jesus and were curious about Him.
* Whoever these Greeks were, they came to Philip and asked him if they could see Jesus.
  + This is part of the reason I suspect they were gentiles.
  + They may not have been sure Jesus would talk to them so they asked His Apostles.
  + I can’t remember a time when a Jew asked the Apostles for permission to talk to Jesus (but I might be mistaken).
* Philip went and told Andrew, then they both went to tell Jesus.
* We aren’t given the specifics of Jesus’ response to their request, Jesus just launches into a section of teaching directed towards “them.”
  + It isn’t 100% clear if “them” refers to the Greeks who asked to see Jesus.
  + Or, if Jesus is talking only to Philip and Andrew.
* Again, if I had to guess, I would assume Jesus granted the requested audience and the teaching in verse 23ff is directed towards the Greeks.

Joh 12:23  And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

* Jesus is the Son of Man.
* The time had come for Jesus to be glorified.
* Jesus would be glorified when He died, resurrected from the dead, and ascended back to God having completed His work on earth to save mankind.
* Imagine the scene, Jesus had just entered Jerusalem to a kingly welcome.
  + He now speaks of His being glorified.
  + What do you think the people had in mind?
  + They probably thought He was finally ready to establish His a Jewish kingdom and rule the nations.
  + Jesus’ next statement may have dampened their excitement.

Joh 12:24  Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

* Imagine a single grain of wheat.
* 
* It is small, light-tan color, and not very impressive.
* If the seed is never planted, it will remain as a small, light-tan, not very impressive seed forever (or at least till it decomposes).
* But if the seed is planted it has great potential.
* It will have to die in the sense it will have to give up its current form, but it will become something far greater.
* It will no longer be one tiny grain, it will grow and produce fruit (dozens of other little grains).

Joh 12:25  Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Joh 12:26  If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

* This parable is a picture of what Christ was going to do for the world and what He calls His followers to do for the world.
* Jesus was going to die to bear fruit, to enable us to become children of God.
* He instructs His listeners to “follow” Him.
  + This is a theme throughout the rest of the New Testament.
  + We have to be willing to die to ourselves to allow God to make us something greater.
  + Give up loving this world.
  + Surrender our identity to Him so He can make something of us.
  + So He can take us from a seed destined to decompose to an agent of new life (John 7:38).

Joh 12:27  “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

Joh 12:28  Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

Joh 12:29  The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

* Here we see the human side of Jesus.
* He plans to lay down His life for the world, but He doesn’t face that future without some dread.
* He knew what kind of death He was going to die and if that didn’t trouble Him on some level we would probably wonder if He was capable of relating to us.
  + The feeling is relatable.
  + Even for Christians who have the hope Jesus was talking about.
  + There is still some dread of death.
* He wasn’t going to ask God to save Him from the pain ahead of Him if the pain was the only way to accomplish purpose for which He came to earth.
* But that didn’t make the reality of pain any more tolerable.
* In light of this dread, His next statement is important.
  + Joh 12:28  Father, glorify your name.”
  + He knew what He was going to have to endure and no doubt He didn’t want to have to endure it.
  + But the glory of God and the work He had been given to accomplish had more governance over His actions than His desire to avoid the hardship.
  + APPLICATION:
    - We need to think the same way.
    - How do we embrace a life of following Jesus into hardship and persecution?
    - Answer: We have to be motivated by a great purpose. By a necessary purpose!
    - We need to recognize we’ve been called to eternal soul saving work and we have a role to play in God’s overall plan.
      * There is a big difference between people who think following Jesus is meeting in a Church building once a week and people who read this text and realize following Jesus means dying to yourself to bear fruit for the glory of God.
      * Those are two different things.
      * Those are two different comprehensions.
      * And they will lead you to act differently when faced with the threat of hardship and persecution.
* Jesus was willing to go through the trials ahead of Him so God would be glorified.
  + His statement to God, “glorify your name,” was met with an immediate miraculous response from God.
  + Verse 29 tells us a voice came out of heaven saying, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”
    - All of Jesus’ work up to this point had glorified God (His words and miracles).
    - And God would be glorified through the future work of Jesus (I think specifically speaking of the work Jesus would accomplish in the next week… death and resurrection).
  + SIDE NOTE: Isn’t it incredible that what gives God glory (magnificence or great beauty) is a display of love and an extension of mercy to undeserving people.
    - God says, the glory He is interested in
    - That is what He wants to be known for.
    - We as human beings seek glory in our accomplishments.
      * We want to be known for doing something great.
      * We want people to associate great achievements with our name.
      * To receive glory from men.
    - God could choose to receive glory however He wants:
    - He could tell humans to worship and glorify Him because He is just so much greater than them and He will send them to hell if they don’t.
    - Instead He chooses to be known on the earth for His selfless sacrifices to save us.
      * When Christians gather, what memorial are they told to keep?
      * A memorial of God’s death for our salvation (Lord’s Supper)
    - He wanted people to know Him as a Savior (hence the display of His character in Jesus).
    - That’s a God I can worship.
    - He wants us to know Him by how much He loves us.
  + Those who stood nearby heard the voice from heaven and said it “thundered.”
  + Some people thought the voice came from an angel.
  + This is the third and final time a voice speaks from heaven in the gospel accounts.
  + Can you remember all three?
    - Jesus’ baptism.
    - The mountain of Transfiguration.
    - John 12:28.

Joh 12:30  Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.

Joh 12:31  Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

Joh 12:32  And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Joh 12:33  He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

* Jesus already knew the will of the Father and His eternal designs.
* The voice came out of heaven for the benefit and belief of those standing by.
* There is a lot of discussion about the meaning of verse 31, “Now is the judgement of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”
* The meaning of the second half is fairly clear, “the ruler of this world” is almost certainly a reference to Satan. He is referred to in this way in other passages.
* The first half is the difficult part, in my opinion.
  + I suspect the “judgement of this world” is referring to the overthrow of Satan’s dominion by Christ and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God.
  + Before the cross, all men were hopelessly separated from God because of sin.
  + In a sense, Satan reigned.
    - People were enslaved to him.
    - They couldn’t escape the consequences of doing will (sin).
  + But Jesus put an end to Satan’s domination when He died on the cross and resurrected from the dead.
  + Jesus made it possible for people to be transferred from the Kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God (by being a part of God’s “called out ones,” the Church).
  + Satan’s fate was sealed, judgement was handed down, when Jesus rose from the dead and Satan lost.
  + Jesus defeated him, took the throne, and guaranteed his eternal destruction.
  + The cross and resurrection were God’s judgement, His ruling, on what was going to happen to Satan.
* With this understanding, we move to the next verse which reads, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”
  + The voice from heaven told Jesus’ audience God would be glorified through Jesus.
  + How was that to happen?
  + It would happen when Jesus was “lifted up from the earth.”
    - Where have we seen that language before?
    - Joh 3:14-15  And as Moses **lifted up** the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be **lifted up**, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
    - Do you remember the story of Moses and the bronze serpent?
      * The Israelites disobeyed God.
      * God sent venomous serpents to bite and kill the people.
      * But God had mercy on them and had Moses lift up a bronze serpent on a pole.
      * Anyone who had been bitten by a serpent could look at the pole and be healed.
      * They were drawn to the serpent because it had the power to heal.
    - Do you see the parallel between Jesus and the bronze serpent on a pole?
      * The Bible tells us every human being who sins is infected with sin’s venom which leads to death and separation from God.
      * Until Jesus’ death, there was no cure.
      * Satan appeared to be on the throne, it looked like he was getting his way, separating all humanity from God, poisoning them to spiritual death.
      * But then Jesus was lifted up on a cross.
        + He allowed it to happen to be a sacrifice for our sins.
        + So we can be healed.
    - Just as the Israelites were drawn to the bronze serpent for their salvation from death, Jesus is telling His listeners all men will be drawn to Him for salvation from spiritual death.
    - That is a HUGE claim!
  + This is how God is glorified in Jesus.
    - Just as it was God who offered the people healing through the bronze serpent in the wilderness.
    - It was God who was going to offer the people healing through Jesus.
    - Salvation came by God and only by God and for that He deserves glory, honor, and praise.

Joh 12:34  So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

* The Jews were familiar with prophecies about the Messiah’s victory, but their comprehension of how that victory would be achieved was lacking.
* They had never imagined death would be part of the Messiah’s plan.
* They knew prophecies like those found in Daniel which spoke of God’s Kingdom never being destroyed, but hadn’t made the connection back to scriptures like Isaiah 53 that talk about a lamb being led to slaughter.
* When Jesus spoke about the Son of Man being “lifted up” they thought He might be referring to someone other than Himself (“Who is this Son of Man?).

Joh 12:35  So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.

* Jesus doesn’t respond to their question directly.
* Jesus’ answer is basically, “Stick with me and I will reveal the truth about the Son of Man, what it means that He will be lifted up, how victory will be achieved through all of it, and how you can partake in the victory.
* The Son of Man would not remain with them forever physically as they supposed.
* He would only be with them for a little while longer.
* Jesus encourages them to follow Him while He is with them.
* If they would, He would steer them right and set them in the right direction.
* But if they turned away from Him, they would fall into darkness and lose their way (spiritually speaking).
* SIDE NOTE: This light theme has run all the way through the book thus far:
  + Joh 1:9  The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
  + Joh 3:19  And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
  + Joh 8:12  Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
  + Joh 9:5  As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”
  + Joh 11:9-10  Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”
* When Jesus finished telling them all these things, He departed for some privacy.

Joh 12:37  Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

Joh 12:38  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?”

Joh 12:39  Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

Joh 12:40  “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.”

Joh 12:41  Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

* In verses 37-41, John tells us about the spiritual condition of the unbelieving Jews.
* It was not for a lack of evidence that they did not believe.
  + Jesus had performed a multitude of miracles.
  + And, as we’ve discussed, there were numerous witnesses and evidences of His divine identity.
* The unbelief of the Jews was not a surprise to God.
* Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet, spoke of unbelief among the Jews of his day and Jews of the future.
  + The quotation in verse 38 is from Isaiah 53:1.
  + Isa 53:1  Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
    - Isaiah’s 53 chapter is one of the most famous prophecies in the Old Testament about Jesus. It talks about the coming Messiah as a suffering sacrifice.
    - Isaiah knew and expressed, in the very first verse, the difficulty people would have believing what He was about to tell them.
    - They would have difficulty, they would even reject the idea, that their Savior, their Messiah, was going to die.
  + Now that we’ve read John 12 and observed how the Jews responded to the idea of their Messiah dying, we understand Isaiah’s concern.
    - The Jews rejected Jesus because they couldn’t fathom the concept of the Messiah Isaiah told them was coming.
    - They didn’t believe Isaiah.
    - They couldn’t accept that the Messiah was going to look the way Isaiah described and I think that’s what John means when he writes in verse 39, “Therefore they could not believe.”
      * I don’t believe the phrase is intended to say they were incapable of believing, as if it was a literal impossibility.
      * Rather, it was that they couldn’t believe because they would not accept what had been written. They had an opinion about the Messiah they weren’t willing to give up and it made them incapable of believing in the real thing.
      * Examples of similar statements:
        + “She just can’t admit I’m right.”
        + “He can’t accept the truth.”
        + Mar 6:4-5 And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” And **he could do no mighty work there**, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them” (Jesus in Nazareth).
      * In all of these examples, it isn’t that the subject is literally incapable of doing something, rather something is holding them back.
      * There is additional reason to believe the Jews were not literally incapable of believing, namely that Jesus had told them they ought to believe.
        + Joh 10:37-38  If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, **believe the works**, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jesus speaking to the Jews who wanted to stone Him).
        + Several other verses in the book of John and the other gospels communicate something similar.
* The Jews of Isaiah’s day didn’t believe him and the Jews of Jesus’ day didn’t believe him and neither group’s unbelief was a surprise to God.
  + God knew how the Jews would respond to His words spoken through the prophet.
  + God told Isaiah ahead of time in Isaiah 6:9-10 His words (God’s words delivered through Isaiah) would further harden the hearts of the people.
  + The people didn’t want God to rule them, they didn’t want the Messiah Isaiah presented to them, they wanted to be their own masters and they only grew more obstinate after hearing Isaiah’s preaching.
  + The text quoted in John 12:40 is Isaiah 6:9-10:
    - Isa 6:9-10  And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”
  + Why is this quoted in John?
    - Because God knew the Jews of Jesus’ day wouldn’t accept His words any better than the Jews of Isaiah’s day.
    - The people didn’t want God to rule them, they didn’t want the Messiah Jesus presented to them, they wanted to be their own masters and they only grew more obstinate after hearing God’s words as delivered through Jesus.
    - We have the same exact problem.
    - God’s message had the same affect on the hearts of the Jews in both generations, it hardened them.
  + SIDE NOTE:
    - John 12:40 says “He [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts…”
    - There are some people who say this text must be understood to be saying God directly prohibited these Jews from believing. He blinded them because He didn’t want them to see.
    - Admittedly, when I first read the verse, that seemed like the obvious reading.
    - But there are problems with that reading.
      * As we already discussed in John 10:37-38 and as we’ve seen throughout John, Jesus tells the unbelieving Jews that they ought to believe, they have the evidence to believe.
      * What sense does it make for Jesus to tell them they ought to believe if God is directly blinding them so they can’t believe?
    - So how should we interpret it?
    - When we look back at the context of the quote (Isaiah 6) we find God telling Isaiah to preach His words to the people and the affect of the preaching would be the blinding and hardening of the people’s hearts.
    - To better what was happening in Isaiah, we can turn to another place Isaiah’s words are quoted in the New Testament, Acts 28:26-27
      * In Acts 28, Paul has a meeting with the Jews in Rome and is trying to convince them of Jesus’ authenticity using the Old Testament scriptures.
      * Some of the Jews believed but others rejected Paul’s message.
      * The meeting ended with Paul quoting Isaiah 6 to the disbelieving Jews.
      * Notice the wording.
      * Act 28:26-27  “‘Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and **their eyes they have closed**; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’
      * Paul attributes the blindness Isaiah talked about to the Jews closing their own eyes to the truth.
    - In light of these three verses how do we explain the words in John 12:40, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts…”
      * God knew the Jews would dislike His message and would harden their hearts against it.
      * God could have chosen to withhold His words from the Jews, but He didn’t, even though He knew what their affect would be.
      * In this sense, God hardened them.
    - Perhaps a modern usage of a similar idea might help.
      * Let’s say I have a relative who has owed me money for a long time but doesn’t want to pay me back.
      * One day, I write a letter to my relative giving him 5 reasons he needs to pay me back. I know the letter will not be welcomed but I need the money.
      * When my relative receives the letter, he becomes angry at me.
      * I tell my friend the next day, “I made my relative mad.”
      * Did I really “make him angry at me?
        + Did I hijack his brain and flip the angry switch against his will.
        + Did he not have any option but to be angry at me?
        + Did I force him to be angry at me?
        + Of course, the answer to all of these questions is “no”!
        + The affect of my words was such that he became angry.
        + The stimulant (words) came from me but the response is his responsibility.
        + As I expected, he became angry.
        + And if I told my friend the next day, “I made him angry,” there would be no misunderstanding as to my meaning.
    - I think this is how we reconcile the difference in language between Isaiah 6, John 12, and Acts 28 (Isaiah 6 is also quoted in Matthew 13).
    - God can be said to have blinded and hardened the hearts of the Jews by sending them a message He knew they would resist.

Joh 12:42  Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue;

Joh 12:43  for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

* Even though many of the Jews responded negatively to Jesus’ message, there were still many who believed, but they weren’t willing to admit it publicly because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities.
* They loved the honor of men more than the honor of God.
* When you think about it, that is a really dumb trade but it happens all the time.
* APPLICATION:
  + We need to be careful we aren’t suppressing our belief in order to secure a good standing with men.
  + From working in the business world, I know and have felt a temptation to suppress my religious beliefs because people who are “overly opinionated” about religious things are often look over when it comes to promotion.
  + The business world is such now that managers aren’t supposed to express their personal beliefs about anything unless its work related for the fear of offending someone in the business.
  + It often feels like a choice between being proud of what you believe vs. keeping your values vague enough to be managerial material.
  + In a lot of ways it’s the same choice these Jews were making.
    - Come out a claim belief in Jesus.
    - Or protect my reputation and potential opportunities to win praise from men.

Joh 12:44  And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.

Joh 12:45  And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

Joh 12:46  I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

* We’ve been introduced to these themes before but it makes sense that Jesus would introduce them again because it’s likely many of His listeners hadn’t heard them.
* There would have been a large number of visiting people in Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover Feast.
* Jesus came to preach the words given to Him by God.
  + To reveal God’s will.
  + To reveal the character of God.
    - Joh 1:18  No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
  + Jesus is the light to save men from the darkness of sin.
    - Joh 1:4-5  In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
  + You’ll notice, John is very consistent in the presentation of the themes introduced early in the book.

Joh 12:47  If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

Joh 12:48  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.

Joh 12:49  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.

Joh 12:50  And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

* Christians anticipate Jesus coming back for Judgement Day.
* But when Jesus came to earth the first time it wasn’t to pass eternal judgement on mankind.
* He came to give us a way to God.
* To save us from sin.
* Those who rejected Him on earth weren’t immediately judged and sent to Hell.
  + Jesus died and made forgiveness available to them.
  + We know some of the people who killed Jesus later repented and were saved.
* Although Jesus hadn’t come to the world to judge it in the 1st Century, He tells His audience they will all be judged one day by His words.
* The words/message He taught them came from God and on the day when the world is judged, our response to those words will either condemn us or be our entrance into eternal life.
* APPLICATION:
  + As we work through this study and read God’s words preached by Jesus, we have to make a decision about how we are going to respond to them.
  + That response impacts our eternity.

<https://www.kfb.org/page/file?path=Files%2Fpage-161%2Fwheat%2FWheatFunFactGuide.pdf>

https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/if-a-grain-of-wheat-dies-it-bears-much-fruit

http://twominutetheology.com/on-the-death-of-a-seed/