

The Lord Urges People to Come to the Light

John 12:35-43

John 12:35-43 – *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.’³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.*

³⁷ But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe 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?”

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”⁴¹ These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Background Notes

Verse 35 says, *“Then Jesus said to them...”* and verse 37 says, *“But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him.”* To whom is the Lord speaking? Who are the people called “them” here? These people were the crowds in the Temple area during the Passover festival.

Remember, this was the last week of our Lord’s earthly ministry, and it was Passover time in Jerusalem. Many of the pilgrims had come from Galilee, and had seen His miracles there. Some of them had seen the raising of Lazarus from the dead at nearby Bethany (John 11). Many of them had welcomed the Lord at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week, but even so, most of these people didn’t believe in Him! *“But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him”(v37).* Jesus was not the political Messiah the people wanted, so they didn’t accept Him as Messiah.

Even among those who did believe in Him, there was a question of whether they had true faith or not. *“...even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (v42).* The “rulers” were members of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews. Many leaders who “believed” did not have true faith. They acknowledged the Lord in their **heads**, but there was no commitment to Him in their **hearts**.

Some of the rulers, however, had true faith. We know from Scripture that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both members of the Sanhedrin, were true believers. They didn’t confess the Lord openly at first, but they did after the crucifixion. John 19:38-40: *“After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews,*

asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a

hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.” After the crucifixion Nicodemus and Joseph were secret believers no longer!

In verse 41 John quoted from Isaiah: *“These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.”* Here John referred to Isaiah 6, when Isaiah had the magnificent vision of the glory and holiness of **God**. But notice - in the context, John applied this vision of God to Jesus Christ! *“These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.”* John meant that when Isaiah saw the glory of God, he saw the glory of Jesus Christ - and he spoke of Jesus. Isaiah spoke of Christ! John believed that the Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah (Yahweh) of the Old Testament. According to John and his inspired Gospel, **Jesus is God!**

This is a good Scripture to show to anyone who doubts that the New Testament teaches the deity of Christ – for example, Jehovah’s Witnesses. Next time a Jehovah’s Witness comes knocking on your door, ask them if they believe the same things the apostle John believed. When they say, “Yes,” turn them to this verse. What a tremendous proof for the deity of Christ John 12:41 is! *“These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.”*

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Acceptance of the light brings more light.

“Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them” (v35-36).

Throughout the Gospel of John, light and darkness are contrasted. In fact, the light vs. the darkness is one of the themes of the Gospel of John. John 1:5 says, *“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”* John was not referring to physical light and physical darkness, but rather to moral light and moral darkness.

Moral light is goodness, righteousness, and truth, and it is centered and focused in Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. So the Lord was referring to Himself when He said, *“A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”*

Notice: if you believe in the Light, what is the result? “You will become sons of light” - that is, you will be characterized by Christ-like goodness, righteousness and truth. You will not only become Christians, but you will become more like Jesus Christ!

In addition, acceptance of the light brings more light. This is a biblical truth. If we accept the light we have, we will receive further light. This principle is true for unbelievers as well as believers. If an unbeliever simply responds to the light that God has given, God makes Himself responsible to give more light to that person.

God has given every person a moral conscience. He has given every person the light of “general revelation.” His creation is all around us! Humans are responsible to respond to the light of God in His creation, and not turn away. (For example, some people turn away by choosing to believe alternate explanations for the origins of the universe.) When people respond to the light of conscience and creation, God will give more light. Acceptance of the light brings more light.

I think the Magi who came to worship the infant Jesus in Bethlehem are a good illustration of this principle. The wise men responded to the light that they had – a star. But God led them to Jerusalem by that star. In Jerusalem they received more light - the light of the Scripture. They accepted the light of prophecy that the King of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. They responded to the light of the star, then they responded to the light of “special revelation” in the Scriptures, and they were led to the Savior! Acceptance of the light brings more light.

This principle certainly applies to believers as well. We have become children of light, and as sons of light, we must walk in the light if we are to receive more light. Ephesians 5:8-10 says, *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”*

Notice the description of what moral light is all about: *“the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth”* (v9). Do we want to have more light, so we can find out *“what is acceptable to the Lord”*? Then we must walk as children of light. Acceptance of the light brings more light.

2. Rejection of the light brings further darkness!

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going’ (v35). If a person turns away from the light, the darkness overtakes him, and he loses all direction.

Some years ago, I was driving a vanload of teenagers back to the Chicago area from a winter ski retreat in Colorado. A snowstorm was predicted, but we were quite sure that we could out-race the storm. We made it down out of the mountains to Denver on dry pavement, but then we made a wrong choice. Everyone, including the other drivers and leaders, wanted to stop and get something to eat. So the decision was made: “Okay, we’ll stop and eat, but let’s not take long, because the snow is definitely coming!” Well, was that ever a bad choice! Is it possible to make a quick stop to eat with several vanloads of teenagers? *No way!* By the time we got back on the road, it was snowing hard. The storm became a blizzard, with blinding snow and wind, and it completely overtook us in Nebraska. We ended up spending the night - New Year’s Eve - in the National Guard Armory in North Platte, Nebraska!

We knew the storm was coming, but we chose to delay! We made a bad choice, and we were overtaken by the storm. In the same way, when people choose to ignore the light, or delay their choice, the darkness overtakes them - and they can no longer see! They can no longer see the right way to go. *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.’”*

John quoted two Scriptures from Isaiah in verses 38-39. The first is Isaiah 53:1: *“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”* The obvious answer to this question is “Not many! In fact – very few!” They turned away and chose to walk in darkness! They have rejected the light!

Then John quoted Isaiah 6:9-10: *“And He [God] said, ‘Go, and tell 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 shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.’”*

What was Isaiah's point? What was John's point? What was God's point? Rejection of the light brings further darkness. It is not God's desire or intention to blind people or to harden people's hearts, but if people **will not** believe, it will soon become impossible for them to believe. If people **choose to reject** the light they have been given, they will be overtaken by further darkness. Sadly, that's the way it works.

When a person turns away from the light, a hardening process sets in. God hardened Pharaoh's heart because Pharaoh refused to obey God. In other words, Pharaoh wrong choices to hardened his own heart. If you don't yet know the Lord, don't delay! Don't think that you can put off the decision to believe in Jesus Christ, and make your decision later. Rejection of the light brings further darkness!

Practical Applications

1. There is a time for us to hide!

"These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them" (v36). The Lord Jesus took Himself out of the danger zone - temporarily. In addition, the Lord wanted to spend time with His disciples, because only a few days were left before the cross. So He withdrew and hid from the public to be alone with the disciples.

There is a time for us to "hide." When our children were growing up, it was very hard for us to have our family dinner in peace, and have family devotions after dinner, because the phone was always ringing. So what did we do? We took the phone off the hook! (This was before the days of Caller ID, answering machines or voice mail!) I'm sure some of these calls were important - but our family time together was definitely a time for us to "hide"! **There is a time for us to hide.**

2. There is a time for us not to hide!

"Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (v42-42). Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were true believers, but they were secret believers.

Are you a secret believer? Am I? Do we hide our testimony because we *"love the praise of men more than the praise of God (v43)"*? Do we hide because we don't want to be ostracized or left out from certain social groups, like the people we work with, or our neighbors? Are we willing to put a Scripture text on our desks at work, or to read a Bible or pray in a public place? **There is a time for us not to hide.**