

Shine the Light

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[0 : 00] John chapter 12, beginning in verse 35, if you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! I'm going to back up to verse 34. So the crowd answered him, This is his last address to the crowd that had been following him and that had been hearing about his ministry for the past three and a half years.

Jesus knows that the next time he will see them, they will be asking, demanding of Pilate that he be crucified.

But here, Jesus makes one final plea. He gives one last invitation to them that they would turn to him in faith, that they would believe that he is the Messiah, that they would trust that he is the Son of God.

[3 : 44] And you know, that is amazing to me that Jesus would do that. It's amazing. They've heard him many, many times before.

They've seen and witnessed many of his miracles that verified his claims to be the Son of God. They had the evidence.

And even though Jesus knows that they will soon demand his execution, it amazes me that he is still patiently pleading with them one last time that they would believe.

How many of us would do the same? How many of us in that situation would do the same?

You know, I know for me personally, I hate having to answer a question twice. I'm easily annoyed with having to repeat myself.

[4 : 51] And I'm easily one who loses patience when people don't follow through with the clear direction that I felt like I've given to them. But man, I've learned that through this passage, that an attitude like that doesn't communicate Christ very well.

In fact, it may achieve the opposite. The crowds ask Jesus again in verse 34, who is the Son of Man?

A question that he's answered many, many times. And so if this were me, I feel like I'd be pulling my hair out. What do you mean? I've answered this question over and over and over again.

You have the answer to the question. You're driving me crazy. I'd be throwing my hands up in disgust. Okay. You know what?

You guys clearly don't get it. I give up. I'm going away. And Jesus will hide himself. But he doesn't do that here.

[6 : 01] Instead, he's patient with them. And he pleads with them one more time to believe in him.

And so that's the main idea for this morning's message. What do we see in these verses? We see that Jesus patiently pleads with unbelievers to trust in him. Jesus patiently pleads with unbelievers to trust in him.

And so I ask you this morning, do we, do you, who follow Christ, do you model that same kind of patience with unbelievers?

Do they hear us make the same sorts of pleas? Or have we become impatient with them?

Have we even thrown up our hands in disgust and turned away from them? We know that Christians are commanded by Christ to make disciples.

[7 : 10] That is clear. And in order to do that, we must be patient as we plead with them to know Christ.

And as we do that, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that God has been patient with us, hasn't he? You didn't save yourself.

He sent someone to make that gospel plea to you. And I know personally I'm grateful for those who did not lose patience with me.

And I'm grateful for a God who continues to be patient with me. And who continually works within me to make me more like Jesus.

Despite myself. How about you? I know it's disturbing. I know it can be infuriating to live in a culture that has exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

[8 : 21] I know the temptation to want to give up on them. To want to just let them continue. To stumble away in the darkness.

But you know, as I read Scripture, I don't see permission for us who follow Christ to take such a stance.

In fact, I see the opposite. For example, 2 Corinthians 5, 17-21. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God who, through Christ, reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

[9 : 23] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal. God pleading through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ. Be reconciled to God.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Just as Jesus patiently pleaded with unbelievers to trust in him, so should we as ambassadors of Christ who have been given and trusted with this mission of reconciliation do the same.

That they would be saved as well. While there is still time. While there is still an opportunity.

Charles Spurgeon once said, If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies.

And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees, imploring them to stay. He said, If hell must be filled, let it be filled with the teeth of our exertions.

And let no one go unwarned and unprayed for. And so in this passage, we are given four principles to guide our evangelism.

[10 : 42] Four principles to guide our evangelism. Principles to remember as we patiently plead with people to trust in Jesus.

The first guideline in our evangelism that we must remember is that the mission is urgent. The mission is urgent.

Urgent. The mission is urgent. Jesus is headed towards the cross. The window of opportunity for the people to hear the gospel from Jesus is closing.

He expresses the urgency of their condition, but he does so patiently. A lot of times when we think of urgency, we think of panic, don't we?

But it doesn't have to be that way. Jesus' urgency is expressed through his words, not his actions. He's not running around shaking them, you know, slapping them across the face.

[11 : 45] Come to your senses. Wake up. Be saved. That's panic. He's urgent. He's urgent. He's urgent, but he's patient. And he's patiently restating and summarizing the message that he has shared with them for the past three and a half years as he's urging them to believe.

Look at verse 35 through the beginning of verse 36. Jesus said to them, And so Jesus is trying to tell them something that they've heard before, and he's restating it again, and he's reminding them that without the light, it's darkness.

You know, these people didn't have light bulbs. These people didn't have electricity. These people didn't have headlights to attach to the front of their horses or their donkeys or their camels to be able to see at night.

If you wanted to travel, you had to do it in the day so that you could see where you were going. And so Jesus likened those who failed to heed his warning to travelers who were caught in a moonless, starless night.

But it's hard to see when the lights go out. And so Jesus is urging them with his words to walk in the light before they are overtaken by darkness.

[13 : 23] He urges them to avoid being lost in spiritual darkness by coming to him, believing in him, and becoming a son of the light who radiates God's glory, God's goodness, and God's truth to a world that is shrouded in darkness.

You know, Jesus often spoke about his desire that his followers be a light source that illuminates dark places.

In Matthew chapter 5, verses 14 and 16, he says, We must be light bearers.

We must be torch bearers as sons and daughters of light in a world shrouded in darkness. I want to borrow an allegory of Plato's, the allegory of the cave.

Maybe you've heard of that before. But imagine a cave. And within that cave are people chained with no way to escape. And they've lived in that cave their entire life.

[14 : 49] And they have never seen the light of the sun during that time, during all of their existence. They have never seen people walk freely in the day.

They have never seen the beautiful colors that the sunlight reflects and pop in our eyes, to our eyes.

Their concept of reality is framed by only what they can gather from sounds and shadows. Now imagine that these cave dwellers are seated with their backs to the entrance.

Inside the cave is a small wall upon which silhouettes are cast. A child standing behind them would cast a large shadow.

And so for those people, all they would know or all they would think is that there must be a giant there behind them. Or for a cat, a cat would cast a shadow that would make them think it's a ferocious beast.

[15 : 58] If you held up a colorful painting, all they would see is a large black rectangle or square.

If such a people did exist, and there was no way to loosen them from their chains, if we didn't have that power, the only merciful thing that we could do and should do would be for those who live outside of the cave to enter into it and at least describe the shadows that they see so that they had a better sense of reality, of what is true.

But in order for that to happen, those outside would have to be willing to enter the cave. They'd have to be willing to adjust their eyes so that they could see in the dark.

I don't know about you, but I like being in the sunlight. Not nearly as comfortable being in the dark. People are afraid of the dark. I don't know that anybody is afraid of the light.

I'm sure that there is some kind of diagnosis for that. But kids don't come running to their parents because they're afraid of the light. They're afraid of the dark. This is what Christians are called to do.

[17 : 20] Jesus tells us to let our light shine in the darkness, just as He did. Just as He left the glories of heaven to be light to a world shrouded in darkness, the darkness of sin.

So we whom He's called out of darkness are commanded by Him to go back into that darkness with the light we have, to take and to share the reality of the truth of the gospel and the hope that we have only in Jesus Christ to unbelievers.

Christians are commanded to speak to those in darkness. And again, this is what we see Jesus consistently doing in Scripture.

He's always going. He's opening the eyes of the spiritually blind by going to where they're at, patiently pleading with them to come to the light, to see their sin, to see the eternal consequences of their sin, and to see that He is the only hope that they have to be saved from it.

But you know, we can become so comfortable in the light. We can become so comfortable with the state of our salvation, knowing the reality of who Christ is, knowing the reality of what Christ has done for us, and feeling safe, and feeling protected behind the walls of the sanctuaries that we have built to worship God.

[18 : 52] But losing sight of the mission to go outside of them, and to share the gospel, to invite people in.

We don't know when Jesus will return, but we know that He's coming back, and with each passing day, that time is running out. The mission to share the gospel then, and to make disciples is urgent. It's urgent. But we can't forget the next principle. The results are out of your control. The results are out of your control.

The mission is urgent, but the results are out of your control. Look again at verse 36 to 37.

When Jesus had said these things, He departed from them. Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him.

[20 : 00] Jesus patiently pleaded with the people one last time to trust in Him, but He did not remain with them for very long in making that plea.

He shared the gospel clearly, compassionately, concisely, and then He left the scene. And then John tells us that tragically, despite the immense amount of evidence that the people had, they still did not believe.

And so we're left with the question to ask of, why? Why not? The evidence is overwhelming. Why did they not believe?

All the signs were there. The proof that Jesus was the Son of God was there. But all that proof, as we see, wasn't enough to persuade them because what was required of faith back then is the same thing that is required for faith now.

And that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit who accompanies the Word, who accompanies the gospel to remove the scales from our eyes, who unplugs our ears that we might see and hear and believe. [21 : 23] And so John here cites two passages from the book of Isaiah which tell us that salvation is God's doing, not ours.

And so inspired by the Holy Spirit, John continues in verse 38, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. And then he quotes Isaiah 53, 1.

Lord, who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? In verse 39 he says, again, therefore, they could not believe.

For again Isaiah says, and he quotes Isaiah 6, 10. 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. Now I have a sign in my office. It's in the upper right-hand corner across from my desk and it's a quote by R.C. Sproul and this is what it says and I've got it in capital letters.

[22 : 40] You are responsible to preach and to teach what the Bible says, not what you want it to say. And I'll tell you, I look at that sign a lot throughout the week.

But you know the reason why I preach verse by verse and chapter by chapter through books of the Bible is because I truly believe and am deeply convicted that the Bible is God's Word.

It is God's Word. And it's a great tragedy that passages like this one are skipped over or watered down by pastors who are afraid of offending people's sensitivities rather than fearing God and doing the job that He's called them to do.

Look, John tells us plainly why they rejected Jesus. He uses Isaiah 53.1 to show that the widespread rejection of Jesus was prophesied centuries before His first coming.

And then He makes the point that the people in verse 39 He says they're not capable of believing.

And then to support that He uses Isaiah 6.9-10 it's a text which recounts Isaiah's amazing vision of God where if you recall God called him and God commissioned him to serve as his prophet but God told him and warned him that his message would not be received and it would not be received because God had already judicially made the verdict against sinful Israel for what they had done repeatedly throughout their history in turning away from him in rebellion and sin that He had blinded their eyes that He had hardened their hearts so that they would reject His message.

[24 : 42] So now here is where we must tread very lightly because for some they have taken passages like this one and they have come to the tragic and unbiblical conclusion that theologians call equal ultimacy equal ultimacy equal ultimacy ultimacy is a view held by hyper-Calvinists but it is anti-Calvinist equal ultimacy or hyper-Calvinism suggests that just as God intervenes in the lives of the elect whom He's predestined for salvation so He equally intervenes in the lives of the non-elect to create a work of unbelief in their hearts in other words it says that God is active in both saving some and preventing others from being saved but that is not the reformed view that is not a view that I hold or believe in because it's not right it's unbiblical

God is both just and merciful the Bible says the Bible reveals the reality of the depths of our sinful condition in many places we're not just a little sinful or half sinful we're all sinful sin affects our body it affects our mind it affects our feelings our emotions our thoughts our spirits our souls in every way it goes all the way down look at what the Bible says Psalms 53 1-3 the fool says in his heart there is no God they are corrupt doing abominable iniquity there is none who does good God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand any who seek after God they have all fallen away together they have become corrupt there is none who does good not even one

Romans 3-23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God Ephesians 2 1-5 Paul talking to Christians who have been born again reminding them of their past and you were dead not asleep not comatose you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world following the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the

sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and we're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind justice is what we should have gotten from God but then there's verse four but God being rich in mercy being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses who made us alive

God made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved God is just the Bible says God is also merciful the Bible says but what we fail to understand sometimes is what mercy means this is a definition from Merriam-Webster dictionary mercy compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm read that again mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm we have all sinned and what we must understand is that God would be totally justified if he left us in that condition we've rebelled against

God we've pushed him away we've gone our own way we've said no God forget it many times we say God I don't even think that you're there we have all sinned against God and God would be justified to leave us to our own desires our own pursuits no one could look at God and say that's wrong you're wrong he was always right totally justified so when the Bible speaks of God blinding eyes and when it speaks of God hardening hearts it does not mean that God is forcing people down forcing people to sin and then refusing to rescue them from it this is not an active blinding or an active hardening it's passive

[30 : 16] God is letting them go their own way God is giving them over to their sins how does that work to understand it we need to understand another concept in the Bible and that concept is called common grace an example of common grace is found in Jesus preaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 45 where he says that God makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust one of one of the most important common graces that God provides for a nation for a society for a group of people is the restraint of evil evil can be restrained by public opinions it can be restrained by laws it can be restrained by policemen and women but when a culture rejects

God when a culture kicks God out of it so to speak he judges them by giving them over to pursue their sinful ways by removing his gracious restraints you see rather than restricting their freedom what he does is he increases it he is not creating evil in their hearts but is removing his holy hand from them and letting them go their own way I hadn't planned on sharing this scripture with you but I'm going to read Romans 1 real quick verse 29 through 32 and since they did not see fit to acknowledge God God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness evil covetousness malice they are full of envy murder strife deceit maliciousness they are gossip slanderers haters of God insolent haughty boastful inventors of evil disobedient to parents foolish faithless heartless ruthless though they know God's righteous decrees that those who practice such things deserve to die they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them are we not seeing in our day and age

God's removing his holy hand in turning our society over giving them freedom to pursue what they desire yeah we are and it's scary so what do we do do we run and hide no we take the light to them and in fact going in what we've been talking about this theme of the people's rejections of Jesus is not new in John's gospel he's not just putting this in here for no reason out of the blue he's been talking about this very thing in chapter six when the crowds grumbled against Jesus if you remember that when he said that he is the bread of life many of them deserted him and Jesus said no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him God gets the results in chapter three Jesus told Nicodemus that it is the spirit who causes someone to be born again only God in his mercy and by his power can transfer someone from spiritual death to spiritual life we patiently plead for people to be saved but we trust that the results are up to

God and there's a parable that Jesus told that better helps me understand my role in evangelism Mark 4 26-29 and he said the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground he sleeps and he rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows he knows not how the earth produces by itself first the blade and then the ear and then the full grain in the ear but when the grain is ripe at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come we scatter seed we share the gospel sometimes it falls on hard terrain sometimes it falls on rocky ground sometimes it falls on shallow soil but other times it falls on good and fertile soil that bears much fruit so let me tell you

I don't know and you don't know who will be saved you don't know that I don't know that and so I go with what I know I'm called to scatter seed I'm called to share the gospel I'm called to make disciples but the work of what happens after that is up to God I'm like the farmer I scatter it I go home and I go to sleep God it's in your control God it's in your hands I don't know who you will save but I know that you will save we are patient and we plead and we pray and we scatter seed and we leave the rest up to God the next principle that must guide our evangelism is that and we can never forget the glory belongs to God the glory belongs to God in verses 42 through 43 nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him but for fear of the

[36 : 22] Pharisees they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue for they love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God and what a shame that it's so often the case that our Christian witness is silenced because we fear men and we desire to be loved by them and accepted by them more than we care about showing and being obedient to what God has called us to do and it's especially shameful and tragic when spiritual leaders seek to be praised by people rather than to seek than to seek God's praise you know if our goal as a church is to make disciples so that we'll be noticed so that we'll be applauded so that we'll lead our association in baptisms so that we'll have bragging rights for that year or whatever man if that's ever the case we are woefully off track likewise if you fear that your association with Christ will cost you a prominent place or position or a relationship that you covet you aren't acting like

Christ either and you are withholding and obscuring the gospel from the eyes of people whom you've been commanded by Christ to share it with a desire to receive glory from men is a mark of shallow and insecure faith if they even have it at all a desire for wealth a desire for fame a desire for attention for accolades for praise oppose the message that we are commanded to proclaim we scatter the seed we trust that God will do the work and as he does it we rejoice man it's been so great to see the fruit that has come through the summer and taking our kids to Falls Creek and to kids camp and to see them follow through with being baptized and man there is reason for us to rejoice amen but it's not because of who we are or what we've done it's God at work he gets the glory and we pray that he would continue to be at work in us and then we get to the fourth principle that should guide our evangelism which is that the consequences of rejecting Jesus must be explained the consequences of rejecting Jesus must be explained in verses 44 through 47 Jesus once again reiterates the purpose of his first coming and Jesus cried out not whispering this is pleading he's crying out 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 the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness he's pleading for these people he knows why he's been sent to make atonement for their sins because God is merciful but his justice is of the holy kind and he will not act as if sin never happened for God to forgive someone must pay the debt and only his sinless son could bear such a burden only his own son could pay such a high price and he did he endured

God's wrath he was forsaken by God on the cross so that by faith in him we are saved from it in salvation when you have your eyes opened and your ears unplugged and your heart softened and the Holy Spirit dwells within you and you see your sin you see the cost of it you know that what has happened is that your sin has been taken off of you and has been placed on Jesus the sinless son the lamb of God became sin he who knew no sin became sin he literally died and paid the price for every sin that you've ever committed past present and future and I don't know about you but I know me and that's a whole lot of sin coming from just one person and by faith you trust in Jesus Christ you know that he's the son of God you know that he's the messiah you know that he's the savior you know that he's your only hope to be rescued he takes your sin and you receive his righteousness he never sinned he lived perfectly sinlessly he obeyed all that the law required with perfection and you get that he clothes you in that so just as God sees your sin on Jesus on the cross he sees the righteousness of his son on you how can we stand before a just and holy God because we're clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ not my good works not because I somehow was smarter than other people to figure this thing out because God has chosen to be merciful and gracious to me you know what that does to me it doesn't make me think wow I'm special it makes me think the opposite

[43 : 02] I'm not special at least as far as the fact that I have sinned and I am deserving of your wrath and that's it but you've chosen to save me by letting your son die on the cross for me and that causes me to marvel and worship and a God who's been so merciful to someone who was so

undeserving of receiving it God is patient and today is the day of salvation but one day that patience will run out and this is the warning we give verses 47 through 50 Jesus again pleading if anyone hears my words and does not keep them I do not judge him for I did not come in his first coming 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 that last day when he returns when the time is out 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 when we share the gospel we must do so knowing it's urgent knowing that the results are up to God knowing that ultimately he is the one who gets the glory but we cannot forget to warn people of what they are being saved from they need to know what awaits them if they do not come to the light they need to know about the reality of what it would mean in rejecting Christ to spend your eternity forever in darkness in hell where Jesus said there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth fire that cannot be quenched and he says it's eternal they must be warned of what they are being saved from but maybe you still don't see the urgency and you might be thinking you know

Pastor Mike I've heard what you've had to say but if God has planned all things from the foundation of the world including who will believe and who will not why should I be engaged in this at all why should I be engaged in evangelism at all this question this question was posed to a classroom of seminary students and one of them was R.C.

Sproul who would go on to become one of the great Christian theologians of our time as the professor went around the room he asked these trained men these men who knew the Bible so well this question and some of them answered I don't know others of them answered yeah that's a that's a good question I've kind of wondered what the answer might be to that myself and finally R.C. Sproul said his professor came to him and R.C. Sproul answered him well I know this isn't the answer you are looking for but one small reason why we should be involved in evangelism and missionary activity is that Jesus commanded us to do it the professor looked at R.C.

[46 : 54] and laughed and he said yes Mr. Sproul what could possibly be a more significant reason to be involved in missions and evangelism than that the savior of your soul and the Lord God omnipotent should command you to do it so we have the command we know this is what God has commanded us to do we have the message we have the light we have the principles to guide us in it we have the spirit we have the means but you know God doesn't need us to do this he doesn't need us to do this but he has chosen to give you and I the privilege to be a part of this we've had the privilege this summer of coming forward as a church and praying that

God would move in the lives of our young people and many of us who got to go or those of you who prayed you received the privilege of being part of what God is doing now to advance his kingdom that's awesome so we should want to see isn't it God has given you the privilege to participate in what he is doing so will you be a part of it?

Two questions of application we don't have church tonight but you know these are questions and of course I wrote them but there's questions that I've been wrestling with and there are questions that I'm going to wrestle with this week because I know that I've got to re-examine some things that I am doing and not doing and I encourage you to do the same the first question what is obscuring the light of your Christian witness what is obscuring the light what is keeping you from being the kind of evangelist the kind of missionary the kind of disciple maker that God God's word commands you to be and maybe you'll understand what is obscuring you by asking the following two questions what do you fear and who do you what do you fear in letting your light shine and who do you fear if you do and then the second question is to ask where is your mission field where is your mission field your mission field

I'll give you the answer for this question the mission your mission field is where you are at the moment God has you in that place your mission field is wherever your two feet are standing wherever your rear is sitting you know what I'm saying that's your mission field but examine your household your neighborhood where you work or where you are active at that's your mission field and so the next question is are you praying and preparing for God to use you in it and I encourage you to pray and I encourage you to put together some kind of plan and preparing yourself to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who God has put you around who God has put around you God has you in a specific place at this specific time you are the light that he has and that he

wants to use to shine in the places where he has you and it's a specific task and it's a specific mission just for you and so will you say like

Isaiah here I am Lord send me use me will you patiently plead with people to come to Jesus Christ knowing that the results are up to his you don't know who will be saved you don't know who will reject him but your job is just to make it plain and to speak it boldly with passion that people would know Christ as their Lord and Savior let's pray heavenly father lord we have come to things in your word that are profound and they're deep they cause us to think they cause us to wonder they cause us to marvel and Lord I pray that instead of running from these things we would embrace these things and through prayer and through study and through reflection wrestle with you for understanding of the truth that our lives would be the kinds of lives that bring you glory

[51 : 53] Lord God that we would set aside whatever comforts we are pursuing to seek to be used by you to make much of the name of Jesus Christ wherever you have us at Lord you've told us the command you've given us the resources we have the means Lord I pray that we would be obedient to what you've asked us to do and that you'd be glorified by all that results Lord may we be patient as we plead with a culture that has been given over to pursue its sinful desires Lord may we not throw up our hands in disgust but may we be like you there presenting the gospel presenting the hope that is only found in Jesus Christ issuing the warnings and trusting Thank you.