

Exegesis

Vs. 44-46 – John now begins to quote Jesus. And we can surmise that Jesus' words here are not necessarily, derived from something said in the immediate context. We know this because Jesus has hidden himself from the public (cf. vs. 36). We can hardly assume that what is said here is a continuation of what was said before.¹ A better assumption is that John has handpicked something Jesus said elsewhere and placed it here to conclude his thoughts in verses 37-43, making a fitting end to his mid-book epilogue.² That John chose this particular quote is understandable as it deals with topics such as light, darkness, and belief, the very things that Jesus mentioned in vs. 35-36 before disappearing. Thus, because of its editorial placement, this quote functions as an interpretive lens by which we can understand not only chapter 12 but also chapters 1 through 11. After all, while these words have continuity in the immediate context, they also echo a few things not mentioned in Jesus' last public discourse, such as the eschatological judgment of unbelievers and Jesus' link with his Father's authority. So, in other words, after John summed up and explained the people's unbelief (vs. 37-43), he now uses Jesus' own words to sum up and explain Jesus' own ministry. Our faithful narrator doesn't want the main point lost in the weeds. He wants to ensure his readership understands that he's still unpacking everything he said in his opening thesis (cf. 1:1-18). As such, those looking for a passage that perfectly distilled the application of all Jesus said and did until this point in the Gospel of John need to look no further than John 12:44-50.

John writes, "Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me." Though placed here by John, we can rest assured that this quote rests on historical (and therefore factual) grounds by how he prefaces Jesus' words by saying the Lord "cried and said." Though we cannot know when exactly he said this, we can understand *what* the Lord said; and of the two, to know what is said is the more important thing.³ Dating is irrelevant without content. Interestingly, "cried" and

¹ Morris (1995), p. 539, takes issue with how the NIV renders **δέ** (*de*) "then," which presumes direct continuity with Jesus' public discourse in vs. 20-36. However, an adversative such *de* would more likely be translated as "and" or even "but." Interestingly, the NKJV is similar to the NIV.

² Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 217; Keener (2012), 2:886-887; Köstenberger (2008), p. 393; Morris (1995), p. 539; Wright (1950), p. 279-280; Contra. Thompson (2015), p. 276; Kruse (2017), p. 318; Klink (2016), p. 561; and Carson (1991), p. 451, all see this as a continuation of Jesus' teaching in verses 20-36. However, they do not explain how Jesus hid himself from the public but then reappeared and began teaching them again.

³ Consequently, little should be made of the timing of these words, lest we risk missing the forest for the trees. In fact, most commentators, though they might not agree on the timing, agree that this quote summarizes all of Jesus' teaching up to this point. As Klink (2016), p. 561, admits, "The (historical) specifics of the scene are not indicated, and they are made secondary in this instance to the Gospel's rhetorical interests."

“said” are terms that indicate loud and intense shouting (cf. 1:15; 7:28, 37).⁴ So, the Lord was extremely passionate about what he was saying and keen to get his point across. But what was his point? The person who believes on Jesus is really believing on “him that sent [Jesus],” i.e., God. Jesus utterly rejects the notion that he has done or said anything of his own accord, with his own prerogative in mind, or for his own ends. He has come not only as an emissary of Yahweh (cf. 1:8; 5:17-19, 37; 6:46; 7:16-18; 8:16-18, 28-29; 10:30, 37-38; 11:41-42) but as Yahweh himself (cf. 8:58)! Jesus is God’s agent and God’s image.⁵ So, to see God’s Son is to see God himself.⁶ This principle will later be picked up again when Jesus chides Phillip for asking that the Lord “show” the disciples “the Father” (cf. 14:8-14).⁷ Seeing/believing Jesus is seeing/believing the Father.⁸ How could Jesus point to anyone but himself when Phillip asked to see God?

Encouragingly, the implication that seeing/believing Jesus is seeing/believing God is that a person will dwell/abide/live in the light of God’s presence. As the Lord says, “I am come [as] a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” This not only harkens back to the episode with the blind man in chapter 9, it is almost an exact quote from 8:12, where the Lord said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” No matter how strong the dark may be, it cannot overcome Jesus, the light of men, who shines brightly amid great darkness (cf. 1:4-5). And so, should a person believe on Jesus—i.e., the Light—it means that they will not “abide in darkness” for in the Lord there is “no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). Their very existence has been illuminated by God himself and God’s Son and so the believer will be able to see where it is they ought to go and to do what it is they ought to do (cf. vs. 35-36).⁹

Vs. 47-48 – But for every promise, there is a punishment should a promise of God be rejected. As the Lord explains, “And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” In these words, we cannot help but hear an echo of 3:16-17 (cf. 8:15), where the Lord

⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 393.

⁵ Keener (2012), 2:887.

⁶ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 217, points out that John uses multiple metaphors to express faith: “seeing,” “coming,” “hearing,” “believing,” and even “eating.”

⁷ Kruse (2017), p. 318.

⁸ Klink (2016), p. 562, “To be Christocentric is to be focused on the Father. The true object of the Christian’s faith is God, and the mode of their faith is Christ (and the empowerment of that same faith is the Spirit).”

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 452, “Thus faith in Jesus (v. 44) is not faith in a merely human agent, one more prophet, but faith in God mediated by God’s supreme self-disclosure, the Word incarnate, the God/man, his unique Son—or else it is not faith at all.”

told Nicodemus, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." On the last day, God will commence with punishment, not pass judgment. Humanity stands condemned *already* (cf. Rom. 3:23; Eph.2:1). Why? Because Christ's word, both in the O.T. and N.T., stands as an accuser to all those who do not put their faith in Jesus (cf. Deut. 18:18-19).

This is why the opposite of believing is not really another action but a state of being. The opposite of swimming is not "non-swimming." It is whatever state the person is in outside of the act of swimming. Likewise, an unbelieving person is a condemned person. If you're a believer, you're, so to speak, swimming; but if you're an unbeliever, you've already drowned. From God's perspective, all unbelievers are already dead (cf. Gen. 2:17). This is why Jesus can say he did not come to condemn the world but to save it—i.e., to *resurrect* it. What further condemnation does this world need? You can't make it any more dead than it already is. The only thing you can do for something dead is to give it life. Thus, the Good News does not answer the question, "Since I am going to die, what should I do?" It answers, "Since I am dead, how can I live?"

Vs. 49-50 – How can Jesus' words have such power that they will stand as the great judge of unbelievers? Jesus explains, "For I have not *spoken* of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a *commandment*, what I should *say*, and what I should *speak*. And I know that his *commandment* is life everlasting: whatsoever I *speak* therefore, even as the Father *said* unto me, so I *speak*." We return, once again, to Jesus' connection to the Father. The Lord refers to speech *eight* times in two verses (italicized in the quotation above), and each instance is directly associated in some way with God. Thus, Jesus presented himself as God's very Word, Speech, or Utterance. "To pit Jesus against God is to misunderstand Jesus *and* to misunderstand God."¹⁰ The "Father" sent Jesus and commanded what he should "say" and "speak," and so the Lord said what he said and spoke what he spoke. Whatever the Son said, he said it because the Father told him to say it. In a sense, one could even say that Jesus never once spoke for himself! And it is for this reason that John begins his entire gospel account by saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So, how could Jesus' words hold such condemnation or liberation? Because they were, and still are, the very embodiment of God. Jesus Christ is God's best and only self-disclosure. The Son

¹⁰ Klink (2016), p. 563, author's italics.

of God is the supreme commentary on God the Father. To reject Jesus is to reject God.¹¹ Who else could a condemned person appeal to if not Jesus Christ? Who else could help them on judgment day if not God in the flesh? When faced with God's inevitable condemnation, our *only* hope is to trust in God's indisputable justification (cf. Rom. 9:33-39). The only One who can save us from God's wrath is God's Word because only through Him is "life everlasting." Thus, there is a call to believe even in a passage dealing with the judgment of those who refuse to believe. If Jesus' words were eternal life back then, they still are today.¹²

¹¹ Keener (2012), 2:889, "By again reinforcing the portrait of Jesus as God's faithful agent, John reminds his hearers that their opponents who in the name of piety opposed a high view of Jesus were actually opposing the God who appointed him to that role."

¹² Morris (1995), p. 541, quoting from Barrett, "Jesus is not a figure of independent greatness; he is the Word of God, or he is nothing at all."

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 38

Text: John 12:44-50

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: