

*Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ's glory and spoke about him.*

*Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him,*

*but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so they would not be put out of the synagogue;  
for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*

*But Jesus cried out and said, "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.*

*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.*

*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.*

*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."*

**John 12:41-50**

We have already noted often here in church that John's gospel reads very differently than the other three, and nowhere is that more noticeable than in John's treatment of Holy Week compared to the stories told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. All four gospels show us Jesus riding a donkey colt into old Jerusalem after the fashion of old Israel's kings. But where the other gospels show Jesus tearing apart the temple porch, and cursing a fig tree outside the city, and directly confronting the rabbi's and priests all week in what seemed like final arguments in a heated debate, John's gospel ignores all that and traces another story line.

John shows us a sadder, quieter Jesus, in smaller venues, mostly with his friends, looking toward his own death, and reflecting on the many different reactions he'd seen to the gospel he was trying to share. And to set the stage for Jesus' final public words in his gospel, John remembers our Call to Worship this morning, a seven hundred year old prophecy from Isaiah in which the old prophet had foreseen that Israel's Messiah would be greeted with the same unbelief and faithlessness all Israel's prophets had contended with, beginning with Moses, through Isaiah, right down to John the Baptist.

It had always been a thankless task to try to teach heaven's values to people whose eyes were blind and hearts were hard to anything that wasn't what they expected to hear and wanted to do. But John hastens to add that the gospel task was far from hopeless. "*Even so,*" John tells us, "*nevertheless, many of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so as not to be put out of synagogue.*" So the months Jesus had spent on the temple porch the previous Fall had not been an entire waste.

Peoples' minds and hearts were starting to move his way, not fast enough to spare Jesus the Cross, but in the years after the Resurrection, Luke will report in the book of Acts that "*...many of the priests*" would become disciples of Jesus. So, like Moses and Isaiah and John the Baptist before him, the Word of God from Jesus would win over people despite the unbelief they showed at first.

Priests and rabbi's and rulers like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had begun to believe in Jesus, a baby faith, not ready to risk their day jobs, standing up for Jesus in the swirl of Holy Week, but the Cross would bring a few of them out for the burial, and the Resurrection would bring more of them, and a month later at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would bring people out by the thousands. But for now John laments about these baby believers that they "*loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*" They were not ready to lay their lives on the line, not ready for prime time. Not yet, but very soon!

And John tells us that Jesus "*cried out*" in reaction to this set of facts. John doesn't say where, or when, or who exactly to, but Jesus' words here in John are more reflective. They're not at all like the headlong confrontation that Matthew, Mark and Luke show us between Jesus and old Israel's leaders. John tells us that "*...Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. Whoever beholds me, beholds him who sent me."* In other words, Jesus' ministry had never been for or about Jesus. Jesus was not after any worldly glory for himself. The life he had lived and the gospel he had taught had always been what his Father taught him to be and what his Father had taught him was true.

He went on, "*I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.*" The point being that sin has left people like you and me in the dark, blind and hardened against the goodness and wisdom that lives in the Father's heart. But not so Jesus! God the Son was eternally begotten by the Father. He had always, only, ever existed in perfect harmony with who his Father was, and what his Father wanted and thought and said and did. Of course, beginning at birth as a human infant, Jesus had to cognitively relearn his Father's thoughts and will and word, but he did this unhampered by darkness, untouched by the estrangement and stubbornness and rebellion and fear that sin breeds in our hearts.

So what he had taught God's people was the perfect, unadulterated, undistorted light he had learned and known from his Father from all eternity past. What Jesus was, as he walked their highways and byways, and set up on hillsides and in village squares, in their synagogues and at their temple, Jesus was perfect, unadulterated, undistorted light. You could do what Christ said and never offend God, you could be what he was and always, only, ever please the Father. He not only brought light to humanity, he was "*the light of the world*" and he repeatedly said so. And no one who believed in Jesus need "*remain in darkness*," he promised.

His next statement is strange, Jesus says, "*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.*" It's strange because Jesus had not been shy through the years about his participating in judgment. In this gospel, he had repeatedly called himself "*the Son of Man*," who had been seen by Daniel in a vision five hundred years before and whose destiny it was to rule and judge all humanity in the last days. In the same temple square, just a year or so before, Jesus had claimed that "*...the Father*," had explicitly given him "*authority to judge because he, Christ, is the Son of Man.*"

Here in our passage today it gets clearer as Jesus goes on, he says, "*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.*" In other words, Jesus wasn't going to judge the people there who would kill him in a few days out of any personal animosity for them and that terrible sin. Rather, their souls and ours will depend on what we make of his Word, his gospel with all its commands and promises inter-twined. What Jesus is saying to the crowd is that it isn't about what you make of me, whether you like the way I put things or do things.

Rather, Jesus tells us, it is about what you make of my Word, my gospel. Do you want the forgiveness my Father has told me to promise you? Will you keep the commandments my Father has taught me must be kept? "*...I have not spoken on my own authority*," Jesus tells them again, "*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 therefore I say, I say as the Father has told me.*" This is the point on which our eternity will depend. What lives in the Father's heart, the goodness and the purity, the fidelity the Father possesses is true.

Any other standard we might try to raise against it is false. Until we believe in Jesus and find forgiveness from the Father, we are in the dark about right and wrong, false and true, wisdom and folly. Lots of things that look fine to us and work fine for us are abhorrent to the Father, and must be forsaken if we will ever save our souls. This is not to say that we can save our souls through personal reform and self discipline. It is to say that God forgives us to make us his own, that he is offering us not only total forgiveness, but real power to change. To enjoy the forgiveness, we must reach for the change, and trust God to keep forgiving us until he brings the change within our grasp.