

**TEXT:<sup>1</sup>**

The late NT scholar C.H. Dodd said that the passage you just heard read provides, “*all the (main content) of the message of Jesus.*” WHICH is appropriate, BECAUSE this is the last sermon that Jesus preached on earth. Last time He ever spoke to the world at large. Since right after this/for the next 5 chapters, He’s gonna narrow His focus to **instructing** His disciples in advance of His death and resurrection...And so of course, whenever you’ve got, as that great theologian, Eminent said, “*one opportunity, ya have to capture it.*” And so this is an incredibly important passage here, in which Jesus is gonna explain 3, not only **Irreducible Truths Of The Gospel**, but 3 truths, WE as a gospel-people, known as the church, MUST therefore herald in our everyday lives/a kind of **Gospel Core** if you will. So let’s take a look at those 3 things:

**First**, the fact that there is **Only One God/Only One God**, which you see Jesus allude to there in **vv.44-45** when He says, “*Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.*” And of course, what Jesus is saying is what He’s BEEN saying throughout **John** - 40 times actually throughout John - which is that He and the Father are one and that He’s been sent BY the Father. Such that when you look at Jesus Christ, you’re not just looking at a great historical figure, you’re literally looking at God...with skin on. The incarnated God or God who’s written Himself into the human story. So in Jesus, what you see is a God who, as John Tyson says, “*possesses passion and COMPASSION so great that He doesn’t just wanna save you; He wants to sympathize with you.*”<sup>2</sup> You might know, the Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan famously coined the phrase, “*the medium is the message*” **right?**, by which, of course, he meant that, HOW something’s communicated is often just as important as WHAT’S communicated. Such that, if God is trying to send you and me/humanity as a whole, a message, then by sending it through the medium of Jesus, what He’s telling you is that: that grace, forgiveness, acceptance, blessing, happiness...salvation...ALL of it comes through a person, not a precept. A person rather than a proposition, or way of life, or the ability to self-actualize and realize all your potential...EVEN a person rather than a religion.

Now that’s important, because when you think about it, it really undermines what’s thought to be a fundamental truth ABOUT religion and spirituality, which is that all religions/all spiritualities are basically the same. **Ever heard this?**<sup>3</sup> And honestly, it's appealing because it SEEMS to unify a broad spectrum of religious beliefs and therefore minimize exclusive truth claims that are seen to be at the root of a lot of violence in our world. There’s even an old eastern parable often employed to make this case, where - maybe you’ve heard it - several blind men are led into a king’s courtyard, where they encounter an elephant. But being blind, they of course, don’t know it’s an elephant, so they begin feeling around. And one of the blind men feels the elephant’s tusk

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<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted:

- Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King! With Study Guide*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 194-96  
 - TRACTATE LIV - Chapter 12:44–50. - Augustine of Hippo, “Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel according to St. John,” in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, vol. 7, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 295.  
 - “Accepting the Judge: The Apostles’ Creed; Getting a Vocabulary for Faith - Jan 23, 2000 - John 12:41-50 // “Sent to Bear Witness” - Sep-Oct 2016 - John 12:37-50 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The Power of Incarnation: TGC Midtown: January 4, 2016 - Jon Tyson

<sup>3</sup> Insights adapted from “Aren’t All Religions Basically the Same?” by Craig J. Hazen

and concludes that it must be a spear that he's touching. While another touches a leg and determines that, no it's a tree. While still another bumps into the elephant's side leading him to conclude that, it must be a wall. And so-on-and-so-forth UNTIL the King - hearing of the activity in his courtyard - comes out onto his balcony and tells the blind men that ACTUALLY they're each merely encountering only one small part of the magnificent whole...elephant. And of course the lesson by analogy is that the different religions and spiritualities of the world are all just stumbling upon only one particular aspect of God, while EACH essentially touching the same truth...And like I said, it's appealing...UNTIL you realize that perhaps the most important part of the parable is that the blind men discover the truth about the elephant ONLY BECAUSE it's revealed to them from above! The king stepping out onto his balcony *right?* And see, that's really the problem with the "*all religions and all Gods are basically the same*" claim. Unless there's some word from above telling us that, there's actually no good reason to CONCLUDE that, especially when both the claims of Christ here, as well as the evidence, are so heavily stacked AGAINST that. Cuz you don't see Jesus here claiming to have a PERSPECTIVE on God. No! He's claiming to BE God. Not to mention, while to be sure, there ARE some common beliefs among all the religions - like God being powerful - the differences are not only stark, they're really pretty irreconcilable. For example, Mormonism, Buddhism, Christianity all teach INCREDIBLY different things with respect to what's ultimately real. Which if there's anything on which religions that're said to be essentially the same oughta agree, it's that *wouldn't ya think?* But they don't! Mormonism, for example, teaches that ultimate reality is physical/that even God is a material object who's existed for eternity. By contrast, Buddhism asserts that ultimate reality is the opposite...its emptiness - no matter all. While Christianity sees ultimate reality IN God having taken on flesh. So an eternal, non-physical being, who's nonetheless created physical existence from nothing and even entered into that existence in the person of Jesus. *So you see?* Those are HUGE differences. And that's just with respect to one question, not to mention questions like: Why do we exist? What's good? What's a human being? Why is there suffering in the world? Where's history going? HUGE differences SHOWING you that not only are all religions and gods NOT the same, BUT given the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that there's excellent reason to believe that a "king from above" really has spoken about what God's really like! So see, understanding the good news of the Gospel/certainly sharing it STARTS with seeing that there's **Only One God**, who's not left us to "blind faith," but rather has objectively established truth in the person and work of Jesus Christ! **Only One God!**

**Second**, along with there being One God, you have to understand that we as humans face **One Primary Problem**. And I realize that might sound reductionistic, given all the problems that seem to plague our lives and society. But you see Jesus makes a pretty categorical set of statements there in **vv.46-48**, saying that our **Primary Problem** is what He calls, darkness unto judgment. He says, "*I've come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.*" And then he says that the way we escape said "*darkness*" is by "*hearing and keeping*" rather than "*rejecting He and His word.*" That's the way, He says, that we're "*saved*" and escape "*judgment on the last day.*" So **First**, what He's categorically saying is that there's a judgment day coming. Which is to say, history is not cyclical. It's linear. There will be a last day. And ON that last day, there will be judgment by a judge. So that's Jesus disavowing any

notion of karma, reincarnation, or as my neighbor believes, that ya know, when we all die, we just go back to being dust and cease to exist. Jesus is saying, No! No. There's a judgment day coming... But THEN you see He categorically says that HE'S come into the world as light SO THAT no one need stay in the darkness BEFORE that judgment day. And what's interesting is that He takes this very positive metaphor of "light" that we've seen throughout John, and He links it to this intimidating image of judgment. *Why?* BECAUSE what He's saying is */listen:* without judgment you and I are in total darkness. Or to say it another way, you and I NEED judgment! If we get rid of the idea of judgment, like much of our culture wants to do - everything being a judgment-free zone as Planet Fitness says - if we get rid of judgment, because it seems primitive or even dangerous, then according to Jesus, we remain in stuck in darkness. **THAT'S our problem.** We're in darkness and the world is a dark place. Cuz *on the one hand*, if there's no judge/no judgment day, then you and I have no meaning or purpose to our lives. In other words, if there's no one or nothing over and above your life, but you, then there's nothing by which to determine if what you're doing IN your life actually matters. I'll give ya an illustration: Recently my oldest daughter comes home and she says, "*Dad I got a level 12.5 on my reading exam.*" Now, I'm by no means the best dad, but I do generally understand how my daughters are feeling in a given moment, and Brooklyn seemed excited about this. So I say, "*Brooklyn that's great!... What does that mean?*" And she says, "*well my class is reading at a level 6.5.*" So obviously, I'm thinking, "*well that's good, cuz by this account she's doing twice as well as her classmates.*" SO you can probably guess my next question. "*What's 12.5 and 6.5 out of?*" To which she says, "*I don't know.*" So here's the thing: It could be - if 12.5 and 6.5 are out of, say 13 - my daughter's a genius. HOWEVER it could ALSO be - if say 12.5 and 6.5 are out of 1013, she's simply... the smartest dumb kid in the class. But who's to know? What's the standard?... *You see?* The same is even more true with what you're doing in your life. You might think, "*oh if there's no God/no judge, then I can live any way I want/be totally liberated.*" But in reality, what you find is that means there's no way to determine whether one thing you do/one thing you pursue/one thing you achieve is any more meaningful or better than another. Cuz in the end, if there's no judge/no judgment, then nothing you do, no matter how passionately you do it, makes any difference. *Cuz who's to say?*... And Friend, can I just tell you: To live thinking that nothing you do in an already dark world, ultimately matters - that's a very dark way to live.

So on the one hand, if there's no judge/no judgment day, yeah you might be liberated, but it's at the cost of meaning and purpose in your life. And on the OTHER/if there's no judge/no judgment day it means there's no hope for dealing with pain, evil, and suffering IN your life. I mean just think about it *practically*: What is life without a higher authority of truth, morality, goodness, or beauty? It's survival of the fittest *right?* Which is cool when you're talking about lions and antelope in the Sahara. NOT cool when you're talking about you and me and the most money/most votes/most savvy being what wins, and that just being the way it is. That's NOT cool. Cuz THEN what you get... is "The Purge." *You ever seen those horror films?* They're terrifying AND based entirely on the idea that there's no judge/no judgment day - what if we removed judgment for just one day - you get "The Purge." Cuz as Tim Keller says, "*if you tell everybody morality's relative, how can you expect em to be honest.*" That's just practically speaking. Think about it *personally* too. Cuz ya know, the argument against a God who judges is that it makes

people who believe in that God aggressive *right?*, cuz they feel like they're in keeping with their God if they ALSO judgey toward others...But if I could be a little direct with you here for a second: That kinda idea ONLY develops in Milton, Wellsley, and the confines of other comfortable suburbs. Cuz imagine saying that...to brothers and sisters in the Ukraine right now. After they've had their villages burned. Seen their daughters, sisters, mothers raped/fathers, brothers tortured. Telling THEM, "*believing in a God who judges, that makes you aggressive.*" Are you kidding me? I'd submit to you that's the ONLY thing that WON'T make you aggressive and will actually KEEP you from utter revenge and retaliation. ***Cuz isn't our natural impulse to wanna get back at those who hurt us?*** Of course! That's the normal-we're-stuck-in-darkness way we respond. What's NOT normal/what's of the "*light,*" if you will, is seeing as Jesus says here that BECAUSE God WILL one day judge and right all wrongs, then YOU, me, your group, your party, your cause, YOU don't have to do that now. You can actually resist the desire to exact revenge because you have it settled in your heart that there's a judge, who WILL in due time. It's why the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the ***Romans***, "*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'*"

And so you see, whether it be meaninglessness in your life or the evil in society - and that's not even to mention our OWN struggles with "darkness"/ya know, doing things we don't wanna do and not doing things we DO wanna do - you gotta see that ***our primary problem*** isn't lack of education, or inequity of resources, or even political corruption; it's that we're naturally "*in darkness.*" In other words, it's a spiritual rather than a political, social, or educational. And by the way that's not a new realization. Back in the 19th century there was a movement in Britain called "The British Socialist Movement," which thought that - like many movements today - that the spread of education and certain cultural ideals would bring about an end to injustice. And there was a lady named Beatrice Webb, at the center of it. She wrote this in her diary: "*I stake everything on the essential goodness of human nature.*" In other words, we're not in "darkness." And we can easily overcome any "darkness" by whatever "light" is within us. That's what she was basically saying...What's fascinating though is she referenced that sentiment 35 years later, BUT in doing so, then said this: "*I realize now how permanent the evil and instincts and impulses in us are, that mere social machinery will never change.*" ...Similarly Lord David Cecil, after the Holocaust wrote this: "*The philosophy of progress had led us - and I'd say, STILL leads us - to believe that the savage and primitive was behind us, but it turns out this it's within us.*"<sup>4</sup> That's why you can't say, "*well I'll just be a good person. That'll allow me to face judgment.*" If you don't recognize that your ***one primary problem/humanity's one primary problem*** isn't educational, political, social, racial, sexual, or even circumstantial, but rather spiritual, then you'll always just be putting a metaphorical "bandaid" on what is effectively cancer!

And so essential to both the Gospel, and being a Gospel-people known as the church is recognizing that there's ***Only One God*** named Jesus Christ; ***One Primary Problem***, which is our darkness, sin, and impending judgment FOR that darkness...and ***Third and Finally, One Hope/One Hope.*** Cuz while we need judgment and a judgment day - so the liberal relativists are out -

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<sup>4</sup> Examples adapted from "The Shortsighted"// John 6:14-65 // *Can't Believe* #3 - J.D. Greear

there's no way, given our "darkness" we can stand IN that judgment - so the conservative moralists are out too. **So what's our hope?** ...And you see it/it's subtle, but you see it in the verbs Jesus uses throughout here...when He says, "*whoever BELIEVES in me...whoever SEES me...if anyone HEARS my words*"...And then by contrast, "*anyone who does NOT RECEIVE my words.*" **You know what those are?** Those are words of invitation, as opposed to action. Cuz again, the liberal relativist says, "*all we have to DO is rid ourselves of this notion of judgment and you live your truth and I'll live mine.*" While the conservative moralist says, "*No! All we have to DO is live UP to the truth, by being good people, patriotic, and trying our best.*" But among the many things, what BOTH of those get wrong is that fact of trying to DO anything at all, when what Jesus is saying here is: "*It's all gonna be DONE by me. You just have to hear it, see it, receive it, and ultimately believe it.*" That's why you see, in **v.44**, He's "crying out" to these people/passionately pleading with them because it's not about anything they/or any of us need to do, but about simply receiving what HE - the God-Man/the Only God - has DONE.

Cuz see, when Jesus came into the world the first time, as He says there in **v.47**, He didn't come to HIMSELF bring judgment. Rather, He came to BEAR judgment. Came as He says in the **Gospel of Mark**, "*not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom.*" In other words, as Keller says, "*Jesus didn't come with a spear in His hand, He came with the Spirit in His heart.*" Came to take nails IN His hands and thorns in His skull. To HIMSELF, as the light of the world, be plunged into darkness. That's WHY when Jesus was crucified in the middle of the day, darkness fell over the land. The earth turned to night. **Why?** Because, for a moment, the light of the world was being extinguished...condemned...judged. The one person who had the right to judge you and me was Himself being judged...literally taking YOUR judgment day. THAT'S why Jesus can say, all you have to do is "*see, hear, receive and believe.*" In other words, do nothing, but like with an invitation, accept what He's DONE!

Now, for those who don't/any of us/any of our neighbors who don't accept that, as Jesus says in **v.48**, "*we have a judge; the word He's spoken will judge on the last day,*" which is again to say, we're not judged on our hands or actions, but on our hearts and our attitudes with respect to Jesus. And that's not to say what you do doesn't matter, it's just to say that because Jesus death on the cross has paid for everything you have or could do, then the evaluation criteria for your judgment is what you do with what He's DONE! That's why He says there in **vv.49-50** that what He's doing is from the Father and that it leads to "*eternal life.*"

Francis Schaffer gave a great analogy for this: A recording device being placed around your neck that not only picks up every deed you do, but every thought and even impulse you ever have too. So that on judgment day, what God does is take off the recorder and simply play it back...Now, for any honest person, that's a terrifying thought **isn't it? To be judged like that?** ...But what if, when that recorder played, it didn't play every deed, thought and impulse YOU had, but that JESUS had? Now that wouldn't be terrifying; that'd be glorious **right? To have that kind of resume?**...In a sense, that's EXACTLY what happens the minute you or anyone believes in Jesus. The day you receive Him your recorder gets destroyed and replaced with His because your judgment day is now in the past/hanging on the Cross when HE was judged for you. **You see?**

***So you know what that means?*** That means this is the greatest news ever/***the source of all hope!*** Cuz it means for example: You don't need to be afraid of the future OR that day before God. Because through faith in Jesus/simply seeing-looking on Him/taking Him at His word, and believing; the verdict's in. God now looks at you and says as He did with Jesus, "*you're my beloved child in whom I'm well-pleased.*" ***And don't we all know that having a good Father, ESPECIALLY one as capable as the God of the universe, means our lives as children are under amazing care?*** So you don't need to be afraid of the future or that day of judgment...But nor do you have to lived paralyzed by all the judgments of those around you now. Cuz I know we fancy ourselves a tolerant, non-judgmental people - ya know, "*you can be who you wanna be, and I'll be who I wanna be, cuz here in Boston we don't judge people/no judgment.*" It's great... except that it's a total lie. Of course we judge people. Do it all the time. We just call it being "competitive," cuz you and I both know/walk around for like a second in this city/in ANY city and people are looking at how ya dress, your waistline, certainly how ya drive, we're always sizing each other up and wondering how accomplished, productive, wicked smaht ya are. We're constantly judging and being judged...And if you live for those things/if those things are the MAIN things in your life, such that you come to church to, ya know, get a little boost of inspiration in order to better go after those things, then you understand, you're gonna be living your whole life UNDER judgment!...When Friend, you just don't have to. You can be free from that because Jesus Christ, the ONLY true judge was judged in your place! In other words, you can live light and free, not having to take yourself so seriously. Being able to humbly admit your shortcomings rather than pretending about em or as seems popular today: broadcasting em in a way to kinda virtue signal about how "real and authentic" you are. You can be free from that. Free from caring what everybody thinks or being wrecked by criticism and rejection. Frankly, you can live with a lot of meaning and "in the light" rather than "darkness" as it were, simply because Jesus Christ/"THE light" was plunged into darkness for you!...This is the greatest news ever/***the source of all hope...the Core of the Gospel!*** Which means, it oughta be the ONE thing you receive if you never have this morning. And ONE thing you prioritize sharing with everyone if you HAVE received it!...***Let's Pray:***