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Sermon Brief
Text: John 12:44-50
Title: Christmas as Joy
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

The third Sunday of Advent! Christ is coming! This we celebrate today with joy, excitement, and anticipation. In the Lectionary cycle for today the emphasis is upon Christmas as Joy. Certainly one of the emotions that we experience each year is a sense of joy and anticipation. The joy of Advent is the deep wonderfully satisfying and fulfilling sense that God is making Himself known to humanity in a direct manner. For the Jewish people of Jesus' day there was a deep hunger to sense God at work in their midst. Over four hundred years had past since a prophetic voice raised up by God had been heard. Hardships upon hardships had been piled on to the Jewish people, particularly now under the control of the Romans over Palestine. Had God forgotten the covenant people of Israel?

The fourth gospel writer brings the public ministry of Jesus to a closing summation in Jhn. 12:44-50 with his story of Jesus. In this summary speech of Jesus we catch a major glimpse into the essence of John's emphasis on Jesus. Hear the words of scripture from John 12:44-50:

44 Then Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. 47 I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, 49 for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me."¹

The gospel writer uses his source material for his story here in a wonderful way. Our text comes at the end of the material drawn from the Book of Signs which served as a major source of material for John 1:19-12:50. With genuine artistic skill he incorporates this discourse material here as a way to sum up the heart of Jesus' public message to the Jewish people.

He makes at least two major points in this passage about what Jesus had consistently proclaimed over the past two plus years of public ministry. First, that Jesus is directly commissioned by God and thus reflects God Himself. Second, Jesus' words come straight from the Heavenly Father and thus define God's will for humanity.

In this realization of Jesus' message and ministry we indeed can find joy and reason to celebrate.

BODY

I. Jesus comes as the illumination of the Heavenly Father, vv. 44-45

44 Then Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.

12.44 Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἔκραξεν καὶ εἶπεν, Ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ πιστεύει εἰς ἐμὲ ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸν πέμψαντά με, 12.45 καὶ ὁ θεωρῶν ἐμὲ θεωρεῖ τὸν πέμψαντά με.

The first point that Jesus made in his preaching was simple: when you commit yourself to me you are committing yourself to God. The basis for such a claim: when you look at Jesus you are seeing the reflection of the Heavenly Father in human form.

This had been the very essence of Jesus public ministry in the narrative perspective of the fourth gospel. At the beginning of the gospel stands the declaration (Jhn 1:1): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The fourth gospel only describes eight miracles of Jesus

¹GNT: 12.44 Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἔκραξεν καὶ εἶπεν, Ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ πιστεύει εἰς ἐμὲ ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸν πέμψαντά με, 12.45 καὶ ὁ θεωρῶν ἐμὲ θεωρεῖ τὸν πέμψαντά με. 12.46 ἐγὼ φῶς εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐλήλυθα, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ μὴ μείνη. 12.47 καὶ ἐάν τις μου ἀκούσῃ τῶν ῥημάτων καὶ μὴ φυλάξῃ, ἐγὼ οὐ κρίνω αὐτόν· οὐ γὰρ ἦλθον ἵνα κρίνω τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλ' ἵνα σώσω τὸν κόσμον. 12.48 ὁ ἀθετῶν ἐμὲ καὶ μὴ λαμβάνων τὰ ῥήματά μου ἔχει τὸν κρίνοντα αὐτόν· ὁ λόγος ὃν ἐλάλησα ἐκεῖνος κρινεῖ αὐτόν ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ. 12.49 ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐξ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐκ ἐλάλησα, ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με πατὴρ αὐτός μοι ἐντολὴν δέδωκεν τί εἴπω καὶ τί λαλήσω. 12.50 καὶ οἶδα ὅτι ἡ ἐντολὴ αὐτοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐστίν. ἃ οὖν ἐγὼ λαλῶ, καθὼς εἶρηκέν μοι ὁ πατήρ, οὕτως λαλῶ.

throughout his public ministry, but these are described as 'signs' (σημείον), rather than the more common words for miracle elsewhere in the New Testament. By this John underscored that when divine power was manifested in healings, exorcisms etc. it was the presence and power of God flowing through Jesus that everyone was seeing. It wasn't a simple carpenter's son from Nazareth who was doing these things. When Jesus spoke words of religious instruction to the people, these were not his opinions about various topics. Instead, they were the words coming from Almighty God and reflected God's message and will (cf. 1:15; 7:28, 37).

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus into this world, we are celebrating the manifestation of God in our midst. And that is an occasion for joy and happiness. God is with us! Immanuel! We haven't been forgotten by the Creator of this universe. Not at all! He has remembered us and has sent His Son into our midst as our Deliverer and Redeemer. And thus we have joy along with hope and love .

For some people this is difficult. For all kinds of reasons, Christmas is not a time of happiness and joy for many, many individuals. Instead, it's a time of loneliness and sadness. Particularly for those separated from loved ones and family. For some the discord and unhappiness inside their family makes Christmas very hard. Certainly there's not much occasion for joy and celebration in such instances.

But I want to say to you today that Christmas can and should be a joyful time of the year. And with a focus on Jesus and away from life's problems it can be such. Put your faith in Jesus and you will experience God in your life! The living, all powerful God who created the Heavens and the Earth will take up residence in your life and make His presence real in your heart. And when He comes in full power and presence into your life you can rise above the sadness and loneliness that you may be feeling during this Christmas season. You can experience not the false and shallow joy of excessive partying and drinking. Instead, you will discover a profound sense of satisfaction and contentment with life flooding into your life. Lasting, deep happiness will envelope your life and give you a wonderful experience of living and hope.

II. Jesus delivers the message of the Heavenly Father, vv. 46-50

46 I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. 47 I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, 49 for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me."

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The second point in our text that summarizes Jesus' message during public ministry is found in verses 46-50. And it has several aspects attached to it.

First (v. 46), Jesus declares that He has come into the world as saving light. His intent is to free sinful humanity from the spiritual darkness that permeates their life and will eventually lead them straight into eternal damnation. This stands as an important emphasis in the fourth Gospel:

John 1:5 (NRSV): "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

John 3:19 (NRSV): "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."

John 8:12 (NRSV): "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'"

John 12:35-36 (NRSV): "Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'"

Spiritual darkness is still rampant across our world today. Many, many people live in utter ignorance of their spiritual condition before God and without any understanding of how evil has gained the upper hand over their life. The exiting message of Christmas is that the Light of the world has come. You don't have to remain enslaved to darkness any longer. Come to Jesus as the Light of God and He will set you free from darkness.

Second (vv. 47-48), Jesus' words will stand as the basis for your final judgment. He makes the point in

verse 47 that His chief mission in His first coming into this world is to save the world. But because His words do reflect the Father's will, those words will come back to judge every one of us in final judgment at the last day. This will be a haunting nightmare for those who have turned away from Jesus' words in rejection.

What a warning to the Jewish people during Jesus' public ministry! And in particular to the religious leaders of that time who were hardened and rejected the message of Jesus. In their twisted understanding of God's will, they failed to see God at work in Jesus and thus they did not receive Jesus' words as coming from God. John makes extensive reference to "the Jews"² throughout his gospel and by this term he mainly has the Jewish religious authorities in mind. Their rejection of Him was deep and consistent throughout His public ministry.

The warning strongly echoes the words of Moses in Deut. 18:17-19 (NRSV):

17 Then the Lord replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. 19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.

With the language of Moses, Jesus warned the people of His day that a day of accountability was around the corner and that they would face the wrath of God in their rejection of the message of Jesus. That same truth remains in place for our world today in exactly the same way it did when Jesus first spoke these words. Turning your back on Jesus will bring down the wrath of God and will become the absolute disaster of your life. You will be banish into eternal damnation where no reprieve or relief will ever be possible. And eternity is a long, long time!

Third (vv. 49-50). But today you have the chance to hear and accept Jesus' words. And as Jesus declares in vv. 49-50 these words are God commandment, and in that commandment is eternal life. Jesus full understood the life giving power of the message given Him from the Heavenly Father. Thus, He strictly spoke only these words to the people because their only possibility of eternal life lay in this message of the gospel.

My friends, life abundant now and for all eternity is found through this message of Jesus. He is the Light of the world. Receive His words; come to Him in faith commitment. Turn your life over to Him with commitment to obey and follow His words the rest of your life. And in that kind of commitment you will find God coming into your life bringing eternal life to you.

CONCLUSION

This is the joy of Christmas! The Light of the world has come into our midst. His words have brought us life abundant and eternal. Do you know this Jesus?

²"The word "Jew" (Gk. Ioudaios [Ἰουδαῖος]) and its derivatives occur many times in the New Testament, with the largest number of occurrences in the Gospel of John and the next largest number occurring in Acts. Judah occurs eleven times, four times in reference to the patriarch (Matt 1:2-3 ; Luke 3:30 Luke 3:33 ; Heb 7:14), twice to the territory (Matt 2:6 ; Luke 1:39), and three times to the tribe (Heb 8:8 ; Rev 5:5 ; 7:5). References to Judah are contained in quotations from or references to the Old Testament, frequently related to Jesus as the fulfillment of ideas or statements in the Hebrew Bible.

"References to Jews and Judaism, however, bear a range of negative, neutral, and positive connotations. For example, John's Gospel contains sixty-three references to the Jews, of which approximately 60 percent are negative in nature, with another 20 percent neutral and a group of 20 percent that reflect a positive image. When Luke refers to Jews in Acts, the references tend toward anti-Judaism. Overall, when Jews are mentioned in the New Testament, the connotation usually is negative, reflecting the developing rift between the church and the synagogue. Unfortunately, this became the seed that in time would mature into modern, ungodly, anti-Semitism." [R. David Rightmire "Jews, Judaism," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1997]