

21. John 12

Andrew Judd

Jesus has now performed seven signs and revealed his glory, but not everyone accepts him for who he is.

Getting started

Of all the signs we have seen Jesus do in John 1-12, which would you have liked to see personally, and why?

1. Water into wine (John 2)
2. Healing of the royal official's son (John 4)
3. Healing of the paralytic (John 5)
4. Feeding the 5000 (John 6)
5. Walking on water (John 6)
6. Healing the blind man (John 9)
7. Raising Lazarus (John 11)

Observation & interpretation

Divide the room into four, each group taking one of the Old Testament passages below. Study the passage then report back to the group what it might contribute to a first century Jew's expectations about the arrival of the Messiah.

1. Psalm 118
2. Zechariah 9:1-17
3. Isaiah 6:1-13
4. Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Read John 12:1-19

- What impact does raising Lazarus have?
- It seems extraordinary that the Pharisees are thinking of killing Lazarus. How might we explain this extreme reaction?

Read John 12:20-36

- Is Jesus reluctant to die?
- In verses 35-36, what is the light and dark that Jesus is referring to?
- Why might it be difficult for people to hear that the messiah will die?

Read John 12:37-50

- Why don't Jesus' signs convince all his people that he is the messiah?
- John says that the people 'could not believe' in Jesus' signs. Why not, do you think?

It is challenging to read about God hardening people's hearts in judgment. D. A. Carson helpfully makes these observations:

"In Isaiah 6 the prophet, after being granted a vision of the LORD that has resulted in his profound repentance and cleansing, offers to serve as the LORD's messenger. And so he is commissioned – but with the chilling prospect of being ignored, scorned and rejected by the people to whom he is to speak. God commands Isaiah to undertake this ministry in the full knowledge that the results will be negative; indeed, such preaching to these people evokes a negative response, is in some sense the cause of the negative response. In that sense God himself, through the prophet, hardens the heart of people – a point later recognized by the prophet when he begs the Almighty to display himself in more merciful ways (Is. 63:15-19). The assumption that God may judicially harden men and women frequently surfaces in the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 9:18; 2 Thes. 2:11). If a superficial reading finds this harsh, manipulative, even robotic, four things must constantly be borne in mind: (1) God's sovereignty in these matters is *never* pitted against human responsibility... (2) God's judicial hardening is not presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate cursing morally neutral or even morally pure being, but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen; (3) God's sovereignty in these matters can also be a cause for hope, for if he is *not* sovereign in these areas there is little point in petitioning him for help, while if he is sovereign the anguished plea of the prophet (Is. 63:15-19) – and of believers throughout the history of the church – make sense; (4) God's sovereign hardening of the people in Isaiah's day, his commissioning of Isaiah to apparently fruitless ministry, is a stage in God's 'strange work' (Is. 28:21-22) that brings God's ultimate redemptive purposes to pass." (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 448-49).

Implications

Sometimes people say that they need more evidence – that if Jesus did these signs before their eyes then they would believe. Do you think this is true? Why/why not?

Is this passage encouraging or discouraging for you as you think about sharing the gospel with your friends and family?

Take a moment to reflect back on this series in John 1-12. What is one thing that you have learned that is interesting, and what is one thing that you want to take away and put into practice in your life?

Maybe get the group to write these down on post-it notes and put the answers to each question at opposite ends of the room.

Prayer suggestions

Pray based on some of the things we have seen and learned in this series in John.

Pray for those we care about, as we seek to share something of Jesus' glory with them.