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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: Secret Believers?

Transcribed Message
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John 12:42-50

We said when we started the gospel of John that the gospel of John is the gospel of belief, and it's not something that we just thought up ourselves. John tells us that, doesn't he? When he says in the 20th chapter that there are many other signs that Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, but that are not written in this book, but these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So, he tells us the purpose of his book is that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, so we call it the gospel of belief. He reinforces that when 98 different times he uses the word "believe" in conjunction with how it is that we receive eternal life. And the thing that we've underscored time after time is it's not believe and do something else. It's not believe and add to. It's simply the beauty and the power and the glory of the gospel of belief.

So this morning we come to the 12th chapter, verses 42 and 43 in particular are going to bring forward an interesting question, and that question that we're going to be looking at is, are those who are referenced in these opening verses, are they just professors or are they in fact possessors of this wonderful gospel? So, there is a broader context to this, and this is what we want to see in our big idea this morning, God's praise is far more important than man's. Just think about these words, God's praise is far more important than man's. His reward to us for faithfulness and service and obedience is so far lasting. It's eternal in its significance. When we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then everything else takes care of itself, doesn't it?

Let's look at the context. This is the end of the first half of the gospel of John. When we come to the 50th verse of the 12th chapter, we have completed the first section of this gospel. Chapters 1 through 12 are the first half; chapters 13 to 21 are the second half. That's why I've chosen to take a break beginning next Sunday, and we're going to step away from the gospel of John for the summer. We're going to do something called just Summer Q&A. I just thought of

this this morning. I would like to encourage you to literally bring your Bible with you for these coming weeks, because part of what we're going to be doing is we're going to be looking at some things specific to the Word of God. I know the convenience of our phone is there and it's easy, but I just want to say, if you want to, bring the physical book with you for our summer study together, but that's what we're going to do. So, we finish up the first half of the gospel this morning, chapters 1 through 12.

Secondly, the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is fulfilled. And again, that's just another statement that you've got to step back and just think about and ponder that for a moment. The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is fulfilled. We know that to be the case, because as we noted last week, and as John pointed out in quoting from Isaiah the prophet, 600 years before Jesus ever came to this earth, had prophesied that when he came, he would be rejected. It is a picture of nothing less than the sovereign providence of God. God is at work, and in fact, at work in such a way that when you look at that 40th verse, he said, he has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal. The continual rejection of Jesus as the light led to a judicial hardening on the part of God of his people, Israel and the Jewish people. And in part, he did that so that you and I, most of us being Gentiles, could be incorporated and brought into this wonderful gospel. That was a part of God's incredible and amazing plan of redemption.

And then that last one, the closing verses of this 12th chapter, give us another Trinitarian primer. It's a good thing, because when we get to chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17, there's a lot of Trinitarian truth that comes to the forefront in those chapters. We will have an opportunity to tee that up a little bit this morning and remind ourselves of this mysterious and wonderful gospel and truth.

Let's look this morning: Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord. It's one of the most important questions that we can ask, isn't it? Jesus is Lord. What must I do to be saved? Is there any more important question than that one? If someone said to you, what must I do to be saved? Paul had that very thing happen, didn't he, in Acts 16:31. He gives the exact same answer that John gives. We noted that last week regarding something else, but here it's the same thing again. What must I do to be saved? Let's look at verses 42 and 43. Let's go right to the text, because

the text tells us what. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, so that 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.

Now, if you've been with us in the gospel of John, you have a pretty good idea where this is going, because we've encountered similar things to this before. Have you noticed the very first word of verse 42 is what? It is the word "nevertheless". And that word "nevertheless" introduces us to an explanation, because what we've seen in the immediate verses before, the context right before verse 42, is we have this stark picture of the unbelief of not only the religious leaders, which is shocking enough, but of the general populace. They simply were not believing what they were seeing, and they were not believing what they were hearing. They were, as John describes it in those verses before, they were walking in darkness. They did not believe.

Then he says in verse 39, they could not believe. They did not believe, then they could not believe. He tells us it's a fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied 600 years before. When you come to verse 42, John's giving us an explanation, and the "nevertheless" is to breathe some hope, if you will, some renewed optimism into this account, because the "nevertheless" tells us, okay, that's what I just described. That's what I just talked about, this darkness, this unbelief, this rejection of the light, nevertheless.

In spite of the fact that we have all these vocal unbelievers, John tells us now that we have some silent believers, dare we say some secret believers. It takes us right back to those verses that we have mentioned numerous times in the opening account, the 11th verse, when John says he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. Now, if you're just reading the opening verses of John's gospel, and you're anticipating this account of the life of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, who was the Word that was from the beginning, you do not expect to run into verse 11. He came to his own, and oh, by the way, his own people rejected him. His own people didn't believe him. But as many as did receive him, to them he gave the right, the privilege, the opportunity to become the children of God, even to those who believe on his name. This is the exact same thing we see here.

So, I simply put before you what they did, and what they did was what? They believed.

Pastuo eis aton. Just that little phrase from the Greek, and I just simply say that because I want you to understand that little phrase, they believed in him, is the exact same phraseology that John has been using all through his gospel. So, in chapter 2, at the end of the miracle, the very first one of water to wine, what does it say? And his disciples, *pastuo eis aton*. His disciples believed in him.

When you go a little bit further to the third chapter, the most famous verse in all the Bible: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Go to verse 18, you have the same thing. Go to chapter 4 and verse 39, the woman at the well goes back and tells everybody, and John says because of her witness and testimony, many believed in him. And it just goes on and on like that until you come to the 11th chapter and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. What does John say in verse 45? That because they saw what Jesus did, many believed in him. I'm simply saying to you now that what they did, John tells us, is they believed, right? Nobody can disagree with that. They believed in him.

Now, look at what they did not do. What they didn't do, they didn't confess. They didn't confess. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but (another adversative) for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, so that 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. So, now the question is what? They believed, but they did not confess. So, now the question is, is this possible? Can they believe and receive eternal life, but not confess?

Let me share it with you. Bible teacher number one. If you do not believe in Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and acknowledge his resurrection and give him your whole heart, submitting to him as your master, you do not believe in him. Then you do not believe in the one who sent him, and you have no faith in God. Doesn't sound very promising, does it? To believe, you have to believe, you have to confess, you have to acknowledge, you have to give, you have to submit, says Bible teacher number one. Bible teacher number two says, unless they later became willing to confess Christ, whatever the cost, I contend that their faith was not saving faith.

So, the question is, can you believe and receive the forgiveness of sin and receive the gift of eternal life even though you do not confess? I want to say to you that I think what we have here is not two conditions for salvation. I don't think John is giving us two conditions for salvation. I do not believe that John spent 11 chapters telling us to believe, believe, believe, believe without adding one word to the idea of believing, and then he gets to chapter 11, and he goes, oh, I forgot there's one other thing that you need to do. To really be saved, yes, you have to believe. I've told you that for 11 chapters, but here's what I had forgotten. You have to also confess. I don't think that's what he's doing at all.

I think the same is true for Paul, because Paul spends nine chapters in the gospel, in the book of Romans, laying out the most articulate picture and definition of the glory of justification by faith alone. Then he gets to chapter 10. Remember in chapter 10, the verse that everybody turns to, he says, for with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. Everybody says, ah, there it is. In order to be saved, you have to do two things. You have to believe and you have to confess.

Well, is that in fact what John and Paul were talking about? I ask this, if confession is necessary for salvation, is your salvation not realized when you believe? Is it put on hold until you confess? And then I guess my question would be: what kind of a confession does it have to be? Does it have to be a public profession? How many people do you have to profess it to? Is one person enough? If you confess it to one person, then is your salvation secure because you've believed and confessed to how many people? Where does it have to be? Does it have to be in a church? Do you have to give confession to your faith in a church? People use this very kind of teaching to say, well, yes, as a matter of fact, you do. You need to walk down to the front of the aisle. You need to respond to an altar call. You need to raise your hand. You need to sign a card. You need to do something because the Bible says to believe and to confess.

We've already expounded on Romans chapter 10, verse 10. I know you all remember well that exposition from many, many Sundays back, but we're not going to relitigate that other than to say, whenever you see the word "salvation", do not immediately run to salvation from sin, right? There are many ways the word "salvation" is used. I'm sure John would agree with that, and I think Paul would too regarding salvation and confession, not necessarily being to

eternal life. But here, the point is this: justification is by faith alone. Confession has to do with my walk with God. Confession has to do with this whole matter of sanctification.

I want you to see that the test that comes before these guys is this, they believed in him. They believed in him, but they yielded to the fear of people, didn't they? They yielded to the fear of people. We saw that back in the 9th chapter in the 22nd verse with the parents of the blind man. They would not confess what they may have also believed because they lived in fear of being cast out of the synagogue. They did not want to lose their standing as Jewish people. Never being allowed to go to the synagogue would be a horrendous thing to have happen. In Proverbs 29:25, the writer of Proverbs says, the fear of man is a snare. It's a hindrance, isn't it? It binds us in ways that God never intended.

I think what we have here is very similar to what Jesus says in Luke 14. When Jesus is talking in Luke 14, he's not talking about salvation. He's talking about discipleship. And he says, you know what you have to do as a follower of Christ? If you're going to be a fully devoted follower of Christ, you have to count the cost. The cost to be saved was paid by Jesus. The means of salvation and the glory of the gospel is all you have to do is to believe. But to be a fully devoted follower of Christ, you have to count the cost. That's what Jesus says all through the 14th chapter of the gospel of Luke. You have to be willing to forsake family and friends and whatever else it takes that Jesus is calling you to be obedient to as a fully devoted follower. That's the cost of discipleship.

The other side of the coin that these guys were seeking was they wanted the approval of people. They just go together, don't they? When we're afraid of people, we also want their approval. So, that's the second thing we see. And it's a theme all through Scripture. We won't take the time to look at example after example from Genesis to Revelation of people in the Bible who were afraid of men and afraid of people and shrunk back from their walk with God. And they were seeking always the approval of men and the approval of people. Peer pressure is real, isn't it? Peer pressure is strong. We have all faced it. We have all failed at this point. I would say many times for myself, where because of the fear of man and wanting the approval of man, I remained silent or I made a choice that I should not have made. That is consistent all

through Scripture. It's a temptation. In other words, it's a temptation for all of us, isn't it? We have all fallen into seeking the approval of people and the fear of man.

There was an incredible article I came across just yesterday as I was doing some reading and preparation. It's called "Men Who Didn't Get the Message". I made copies. They're out in the foyer at the place where the articles are held. It's the story of three scientists. They're willing to stand up against, you know, just evolutionary materialism. They're strong followers of Christ. One of them is Dr. James Tour at Rice University. He's just an incredible, outstanding chemist. He is almost without peer, except that he is not yet a member of the National Academy of Sciences because the other guys won't vote him in. Because he won't follow everything that they want him to follow. He believes that God created the world. He asks questions all the time that he says they simply can't answer. The article said that he has brought in more money to Rice University through scientific grants than any other single professor. There was an article written about him called "The World's Most Influential Scientific Mind". He's willing to stand up and count the costs. He doesn't care. He doesn't care what other scientists think about him. He believes the Bible. He believes what the Bible says, and he's just standing on it. It's a wonderful story.

Ed Welch has written a great book, *When People Are Big and God Is Small*. That's it right there, isn't it? When we're afraid of people, when we are wanting the approval of people more than the approval of God, people have become big and God has become small. That's a sad thing for us to have to acknowledge at times, but that's the reality for us, isn't it?

Here, before we go on, would you turn over to the 19th chapter? I want you to see why I believe what I have put forward regarding this thesis. Because we're to live for an audience of one. We come to faith in Christ and we receive eternal life by believing. But then we have to make hard choices sometimes in our walk with God to stand firm for him and for him alone. But look at what it says in verse 38 of chapter 19. After these things (talking about Jesus' death), Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So, he came and took away his body. Verse 39, Nicodemus also, who had earlier come to Jesus by night.

There it is. These guys believed. They didn't confess until after the death of Christ. And then the boldness of God's Spirit compelled them to go to the authorities and say, we're part of his following. We want his body. So, I think that is a good summary. Don't be ashamed of what you believe as a follower of Christ. That's kind of the bottom line, isn't it?

Let's look at verses 44 through 50. What we have here is simply a summary of what Jesus has taught to this point. I think if you look at these verses, I mentioned this last week, but I'll say it again, these verses that we're looking at happened chronologically before verse 36. In verse 36, Jesus ended his public ministry, and John said in verse 36 that he went away, and they didn't see him again until his arrest. So, what John does in these verses is he just summarizes what he has heard Jesus teach, probably as recent as these other things that we've looked at in this context.

So, first of all, he tells us who Jesus is. Look at verse 44, and Jesus cried out, which by the way, there are only four or five times in the Gospel of John where we read that Jesus cried out. Don't just go by that too quickly, because it literally means he screamed out these words. He lifted his voice to a different level, and he cried out. He does it obviously from the cross. He did it in the 11th chapter when he called Lazarus out of the grave, right? He did it at the Feast of Dedication when he said, I am the light of the world. So, you have those places.

John wants us to see that what Jesus has communicated here is important. It begins with who Jesus is, and Jesus tells us that he is one with the Father, verse 44. Jesus cried out and said, whoever believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me. Right here, we're back to the mystery of the Trinity, because Jesus is talking about himself, and he's talking about somebody else. He's talking about the Father. He's making a distinction between himself and the Father.

As Trinitarians, we are Trinitarian in our understanding of who God is, and what that simply means is God is three persons. In this context, he's Father and he's Son. When we get to chapter 17, he's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God, and then the truth is we understand there is one God in essence. So, one in essence, three in subsistence is the way theologians say it. But the "what" has to do with God being one. The "who" has to do with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What Jesus is denying here is he's denying what is called modalism. Modalism is a doctrine of the Trinity that denies, in essence, the Trinity. It's very familiar within charismatic Pentecostal churches sometimes, not always. But modalism says God appears at different times and in different places in different ways, in different modes. So, sometimes he appears as the Father, and then the next time he appears he's the Son, and then in another setting he appears and he's the Holy Spirit. So, they deny the Trinity. There's one person, and he just appears, and what Jesus is clearly saying, that's not true. There is the Father. There is the Son. Jesus has been sent from the Father. That's what he is telling us here, and he has said that many times.

Secondly, he says he is God. Jesus is God. Verse 45, I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. So, here's the answer to the question: what is God like? You know, every so often somebody raises that issue and says if there is a God, why doesn't he just show himself to us? Why doesn't he just make himself known? It would solve all our problems, wouldn't it? We would all go, oh, okay, there is a God. He has shown himself. He's revealed himself.

And your answer is what? He has. He has in the person of Jesus, right? That's the whole point. That's what Jesus is saying. I am God. I have been sent by the Father, and he is answering the question, what does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God act like? It's back to the 18th verse. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. It's all through John's gospel. Paul speaks of it in Colossians 1:15, and the writer of Hebrew says it in the first chapter and the third verse. He is the exact representation of the Father. That's the words of Scripture. He is the exact representation of the Father. That's who Jesus is.

All these things then point us to the fact that he is the light. Jesus is the light, verse 46. I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. All these references to light, all these references to darkness. We go back to what we saw last week as well. When you think about light, you think about revelation. When you think about light, you think about illumination. When you think about light, we even have the expression, the light came on. If you're grappling with some problem in math, as I grappled with some incredibly difficult trigonometry problem, which I never did. I would have never been able to

say, the light just came on, because the light never came on for me in that regard. But you know what we say when we're grappling with something we don't understand and then we finally get some insight into it. That's what we say – the light came on. Jesus is the light. he came into the world. He came that we might not walk in darkness. But walk in light.

Now that last thing. That's who Jesus is. Now why he came In verses 47 to 50. Why he came. Verse 47. He says I haven't come to judge. Verse 47. 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. Oh, here we have found again the world's favorite verse. Don't judge me. Don't judge me. even Jesus didn't judge. He says he didn't judge. He didn't come into the world to judge. Everybody loves a Jesus who doesn't judge. That seems like what he's saying here. It was the very thing that he said back in the third chapter in verse 17 that he didn't come into the world To condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

Why didn't he come into the world to condemn the world? Why didn't he come into the world to judge the world? Because the world was already under condemnation The world was already under judgment at his first coming. He didn't need to come into the world to judge the world. The world was already under the penalty of sin. It started in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve. From that point on. all of humanity Born into this world has been born in a condition of being judged by God and under condemnation because we're all separated from God by sin.

We've talked often about the hour. Jesus talks a lot about the hour. It's not precisely this way but you can understand that in a sense there were two hours. The first hour Jesus came to bring redemption. He came to bring salvation. We know the cross was a means of judgment, so it doesn't hold completely true, but in general you can say Jesus at his first coming and the first hour revolved largely around redemption and salvation. At his second coming It's going to largely revolve around judgment. Jesus rightly says I haven't come to judge.

Secondly, I have come by the authority of my father. Verse 48. 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. These are amazing words. If you ever wonder why the Bible is different than every other book that you'll encounter, that's part

of what we're going to look at like next Sunday, Lord willing. It is because a verse like this. A human mind would not come up with these kinds of thoughts. This is not of human origin. This is the Spirit of God speaking through the Son of God and saying 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 given himself given me a commandment what to say and what to speak. It's the word that has such authority. It's the word that has such power in John 6;33.

Remember this. it's the Spirit that gives life, John says in John 6. It's the Spirit who gives life. What does he say next? The flesh is no help at all. It's the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. It comes through the power of God's Word and the power of the gospel. I think that's clearly what he's saying here. Our relationship to the written word and our relationship to the living word is what makes all the difference. Just as the Father sent the Son so the Son turns around and sends the disciples. We too in the line of those disciples have been sent.

What we have here is the great missionary mandate. Why do we go into all the world? Why do we invite 300 kids to come on our campus for a week and just expend all that energy? Because that's the mission that God has given to us. Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Why? Because the father sent Jesus to do that same thing, and Jesus sends us to do that as well. I think the commandment that he speaks of here is nothing less than the gospel. \

Finally, I have come to do the father's will. Verse 50. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say therefore I say as the father has told me. This is an incredibly beautiful picture of the life of our Lord and the obedience of Christ. Our Lord's consuming desire was to obey and do the will of the Father. Our Lord's greatest passion was to live every day and every moment of every day consistent with and obedient to the word and will of the Father. That should be my consuming passion and that should be your consuming passion. That should be our consuming desire.

What greater witness and testimony is there to the fact that we have believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we have life in his name than to give our life in obedience to him, every area of our life. That's the Lordship of Christ. We don't just give Jesus Sunday morning at 9:30 to noon. No. That's a travesty. That's blasphemy We live every day,

every moment of every day with every fiber of our being, crying out as we already have sung: Lord, I need you. I need you every hour. I need you because I want to walk in obedience just as Jesus did. Jesus showed us what the Father is like. Jesus represents to us this wonderful example.

What do we take away? There's no way to bring more joy and glory to God than to follow Jesus's example and walk in obedience to the Father's will. That's what we've just discussed. Living not either in fear of man or pursuing the approval of men, but boldly and unashamedly living for Christ. God, give Covenant Community Church and the people who call this their home that kind of boldness, that kind of willingness to step out and count the cost so that we care neither about the fear of man, nor do we care about the approval of man. Our consuming passion is to live to bring joy and glory to our Father.

Do you know how you start that journey? There's only one way. It's only one way to start that journey That is simply by believing. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Believe that Jesus came to this earth – that he died on the cross, that he rose again, and he did all of that for you, and he did all of that for me. When we believe that and believe that alone, God doesn't say believe and do other things. It's not believe and be baptized. It's not believe and go to church every Sunday. It's not believe and be a good neighbor. All of those are good. But all you have to do according to Paul speaking at Acts 16:31. What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Make sure before you leave today you've done that.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this wonderful, wonderful Gospel of John. Father, these opening 12 chapters reveal to us Jesus – his heart, his passion, his love, his desire to please you, his desire to provide salvation and eternal life and Forgiveness of sin to each of us who will believe. Nothing more than that. Father, but to believe. To confess, to understand Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, Lord, we do that. We do that. You know the way that we walk with you and the obedience that we show to you. We pray that you will be honored and glorified in all these things. In Jesus's name, amen.