

They Loved the Praise of Men **(John 12:42-43)**

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background

- a. We have come to the last week of Jesus' life. He has entered Jerusalem riding on donkeys to great fanfare. It is just a few days before He is to be crucified.
- b. Jesus speaks about His impending death: He will be "lifted up"; the light of the world is about to be "taken away".
- c. He had just quoted from **Isaiah 53** ("Who has believed our report?") and **Isaiah 6** (in the throne room, where it speaks of the eyes of people being blinded, and their hearts being hard so they do not see or hear).

II. Many Believing Jews Denied Jesus Because They Loved the Praise of Men More than the Praise of God

- a. Read **John 12:42-43**.
- b. Many believed in Jesus, but did not confess their belief in Him
 - i. Why they believed in Him
 1. Even many who were "*among the rulers*" believed in Him.
 2. The evidence of the miraculous signs and fulfilled prophecies, pointing to Him being the Messiah, the Christ.
 3. The miracles included:
 - a. Turning water to wine
 - b. Feeding thousands with manna
 - c. Walking on water, on the Sea of Galilee
 - d. Healing the sick and the crippled
 - e. Healing a man who had been blind from birth
 - f. Raising Lazarus from the tomb, after he had been dead four days.

- ii. **Question:** Why did many believers not want to admit their faith that Jesus was the Christ?
1. Fear that they would be put out of the synagogue, by the Pharisees.
 2. This was the same reaction we saw in the parents of the young man born blind that Jesus had healed in **John 9**.
 - a. “But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ His parents answered them and said, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.’ His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’” (**John 9:18-23**, NKJV)
 3. **Answer (to the above question):** They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
 - a. This is a terrible sin that entangles and destroys so many. We must address this sin in our own hearts as well.

III. What do the Scriptures Say about Seeking God’s Praise over Man’s Praise?

- a. **Question:** Do you really think of *God* as praising you?
 - i. My wife Alison asked a great question as we were talking about this passage.
 1. Her question: Does God really want to praise *me*? Aren’t we supposed to be *praising God*?
 - ii. Let’s consider the following Scriptures.
 1. “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” (**John 5:44**, NKJV)
 2. In **Matthew 24 & 25**, Jesus speaks about what it will be like at His return. He contrasts how those who are found obedient

and doing his work when He returns will be treated, versus how the disobedient and lazy will be treated. From the Parable of the Talents:

- a. To those who were given the two and five talents and put them to work, He says "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord". (**Matthew 25:21 and 25:23**, NKJV)
 - b. To the other servant who was lazy and made excuses, He rebukes with the words, "You wicked, lazy servant". Then He gives the order, "Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (from **Matthew 25:26-30**)
- iii. I think of "seeking the praise from God" as being faithful and obedient to the teachings of Jesus and doing the work of the kingdom; looking forward to receiving from the Lord the commendation, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*"
 - iv. What kept so many from acknowledging Jesus was that *they wanted to be thought well of* by the religious leaders, and by their associates. That was more important to them than seeking and obtaining the praise of God.
 - v. Our hearts are going to be tested in this area; just as those of the Jews were, then.
- b. Jesus spoke directly about the testing we face as we seek the praise of God.
 - i. Those who want to follow Jesus should expect to be tested from time to time.
 1. How much do you love God?
 2. If it comes to a choice between standing for what is true to please God but get rejected by people (even religious leaders or those your friends look up to), who will you seek to please? Will it be God, or men?
 - ii. From the Sermon on the Plain, in **Luke 6**:
 1. "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets." (**Luke 6:22-23**, NKJV)

2. “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*” (**Luke 6:26**, NKJV)
- iii. Consider the parallel passage in **Matthew 5**, in the Sermon on the Mount.
 1. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (**Matthew 5:10–12**, NKJV)
- iv. Jesus makes the point that in the past the false prophets were popular, while the *real* prophets of God were persecuted. He says that His followers should expect to see *the same pattern* continuing in the future.
 1. **Question:** Do you want to be treated like the prophets were treated?
- v. Stephen made the same point right before he was killed.
 1. Read **Acts 7:51-60**.
 2. Stephen’s 3-point sermon:
 - a. Your fathers rejected Moses.
 - b. Your fathers rejected Joseph.
 - c. You are *just like your fathers*: you recently rejected and murdered the Messiah, the Christ!
 3. Stephen reminds the Jews, “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” He says they even killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One.
 4. Stephen himself is killed by the religious leaders for speaking the truth; and is honored by the sight of Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
 5. Stephen is an inspiring example of someone who was more concerned about the praise of God than the praise of men.
- c. Other heroes of faith whose inspiring lives provide great examples in seeking the praise of God rather than the praise of men:

- i. The heroes of faith from the Old Testament who are recounted in **Hebrews 11**. Read the conclusion of that discussion, in **Hebrews 11:35-40**.
 1. This is not an academic history lesson! The writer of Hebrews is writing to the Christians explaining that this is how the heroes of faith were treated. Faithful Christians can expect to be treated the same way. If we follow their example, we too can be faithful until the end and receive God's praise, honor, and glory.
 2. Regarding the reference to "they were sawn in two", note that there is a Jewish tradition that under King Manasseh, the prophet Isaiah was put inside a hollow log alive, which was then sawn in two!
- ii. Rahab
 1. Read **Joshua 2:4-13**.
 2. Rahab feared God more than the king and others in the city of Jericho.
 3. She risked her life to save the lives of the two Israelite spies by hiding them on her roof.
- iii. Elijah the prophet, enemy of Ahab and Jezebel
 1. Ahab is a very wicked king. Elijah goes into hiding. But they come face-to-face.
 2. The showdown at Mt. Carmel.
 - a. Read **1 Kings 18:17-22**, designated **3 Kingdoms 18:17-22** in the LXX.
 - b. One prophet of God vs. 850 false prophets!
 3. At the cave, after fleeing Jezebel
 - a. Read **1 Kings 19:8-10**, designated **3 Kingdoms 19:8-10** in the LXX.
 - b. Elijah must stand alone, with God only on his side, in confronting the entire corrupt religious establishment of his nation.
 - c. Clearly, Elijah loved the praise of God more than the praise of men!

iv. Micaiah the prophet, son of Imla

1. Read **2 Chronicles 18:1-27**.
2. This man is a prophet of God!
3. Wicked King Ahab hated the prophet Micaiah, “because he never prophesies anything good concerning me”.
4. The 400 other prophets prophesied what the king wanted to hear: that Ahab would see victory against his enemies in the upcoming battle.
5. After he speaks to king Ahab, the prophet is slapped and cast into prison “to eat the bread of affliction and the water of affliction”.
6. Micaiah concludes saying if these things don’t happen, the Lord has not spoken to him. He does not back down, even as he is taken off to prison.
7. Prophets like Micaiah simply did not care what people thought or said. They boldly proclaimed the word of the Lord, concerned only about what was important to God.

v. Consider the life of the prophet Jeremiah.

1. The false prophets prophesied lies and the people loved it. Yet Jeremiah spoke the truth and was mocked, abused, imprisoned and cast into a muddy cistern. The king cut his letter into pieces and had them burned.
2. Read **Jeremiah 5:30-31** and **14:14-16**.
 - a. The land was filled with false prophets who prophesied lies.
3. Read **Jeremiah 20:7-12**.
 - a. Jeremiah was mocked and threatened when he prophesied. Yet he could not hold back from speaking the word of the Lord.
4. Read **Jeremiah 26** (equivalent to **Jeremiah 33** in the LXX).
 - a. The rulers, priests and false prophets wanted to put Jeremiah to death.
5. Read **Jeremiah 36-38** (equivalent to **Jeremiah 43-45** in the LXX).

- a. The king burns the scroll containing the word of God, from Jeremiah. People lie about him; he is cast in prison and then into a muddy pit.
- b. Jeremiah remains faithful to the end.
- d. Bad examples of leaders *who caved to pressure* from others, *pleasing people instead of God*, include:
 - i. Aaron, in the golden calf incident (**Exodus 32**).
 - ii. Saul, in refusing to destroy all what was captured when defeating the Amalekites (**1 Samuel 15**, designated **1 Kingdoms 15** in the LXX). He kept back the things of value to please his people, instead of destroying everything as God told him to do.
 - iii. Solomon, who as an older man sacrificed to pagan gods on the high places to please his pagan wives (**1 Kings 11:1-7**, designated **3 Kingdoms 11:1-7** in the LXX).

IV. Questions and Challenges for Us

- a. **Questions:**
 - i. When put to the test, do you want to please God over men?
 - ii. Do you really want to be cut out of the same cloth as the prophets, receiving praise from God but persecution from men?
- b. Most religious Christians today seek to find a group they like, then more or less conform to that group.
 - i. Those who like ritual experience, pageantry, large numbers, cultural familiarity, claim of apostolic succession of leadership, may gravitate toward Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches.
 - ii. Those who want dynamic “worship experience” with conveniences, entertaining speakers, programs to serve their needs (marriage, child-rearing, social services) may gravitate toward Protestant meg-churches.
 - iii. Some gravitate toward friendly, “inclusive” community churches that emphasize being nice people more than holding to any specific faith.
 - iv. Others are drawn to familiar cultural settings, rules that give a sense of identity, wholesome family lifestyles, etc.
- c. The tendency is to conform to whatever group you are a part of. After all, this is God’s church, you are part of the group, and the leaders are nice

people and they do quote the Word of God. So, they *must* be correct on all the important things, *right?* (Isn't that what *almost everyone thinks*, people who are in all these different groups that have wildly divergent teaching?)

- i. Unfortunately, you cannot just blindly go along with whatever group we happen to be in.
- ii. Paul warned Timothy, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." (**2 Timothy 4:1–4**, NKJV)
 1. Here the word "doctrine" simply means "*teaching*". Unlike what many believe, it does not refer specifically to *theology*.
 2. We are commanded by God to preach the word and oppose false teaching! Paul is warning Timothy that people will turn away from the truth. The same holds true for us today.
 3. Sadly, when you speak the truth and oppose false teaching, this will eventually get you in trouble in almost any group!
- d. There are two steps required if you want to live a life devoted to pleasing God rather than people.
 - i. The *first step* is that you need to know for certain what pleases God.
 1. All of us must take responsibility to know what Jesus and the apostles taught, and to be able to show where they taught it (specifically, where *in the Bible*).
 2. You can't seek to please God *unless you know what He says*. This also involves:
 - a. Separating out what God says versus what the culture around us is pushing as acceptable.
 - b. Separating out the commands of God from rules made by religious men (**Mark 7:1-8**).
 3. This is why we emphasize expository teaching so much in our church, and generally post the notes to each lessons, with all the Scripture references. We want you to study these things

out for yourself, in context, to develop rock-solid convictions regarding who God is, and what He calls us to be and do.

4. Case in point this week: a document signed this week in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar (top Sunni Muslim cleric). While most of what was in the document was positive (promoting peace and tolerance), there was one peculiar statement that has received some attention.
 - a. “Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings.” (Source: *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, posted on Vatican website, signed 2/4/2019)
 - b. Some conservative Catholics and others were alarmed by the statement about “diversity of religions” being “willed by God”. They pointed out that this contradicted what other Popes have stated throughout the ages.
 - c. However, someone familiar with the Bible should realize immediately that this claim made in the Vatican document *is absolutely wrong*.
 - d. I appreciate that religious leaders are striving to correct intolerances of the past that led to genocides, religious-infused wars, oppression of women and certain races and religions. However, we cannot address past injustices by violating the word of God.
 - i. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (**John 14:6**, NKJV)
 - ii. “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” (**Matthew 24:11**, NKJV)
 - iii. “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (**Matthew 24:24**, NKJV)
 - iv. When Paul came to Athens, he did not preach that the great diversity of temples and gods was something intended by God. Quite the contrary, he said:

1. “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (**Acts 17:30-31**, NKJV)
 2. **Question:** How was Paul treated for speaking this way? **Answer:** He was mocked; yet some wanted to hear more, and ultimately believed!
5. So, the first step required to lead a life devoted to pleasing God rather than people is *to know what pleases God*.
- ii. The *second step* required to lead a life devoted to pleasing God is that you need to have the courage to do what pleases God, even though it offends people.
1. A story of my own discussions this week with someone from a Muslim background, at work.
 - a. He knew I had been in the ministry many years ago, asked why I had left the ministry to resume a career in engineering.
 - b. When I told him, “because I was fired”, he wanted to know more. I told him that would be a longer discussion, so we had lunch out together on Friday.
 - c. He shared with his wife, and she wondered if it was because of some child abuse or sexual type scandal! (I told him she might be disappointed to learn that it certainly was *nothing like that!*)
 - d. I told him how and why I became a Christian, what the faith is, and how we can know for sure.
 - i. The Christian faith is based on the historic facts of Jesus dying on the cross and being raised on the third day, in fulfillment of the prophecies. (**1 Corinthians 15:1-5**)
 - ii. If those assertions are true, then Jesus is the Son of God just as He said. In that case, *anyone* who claims to be from God but insists that these

things did not happen (that Jesus *did not* die on the cross or *was not* resurrected on the third day) must be a *false prophet*.

- e. When we speak the truth, it will offend many people, but some will believe. We must please God, rather than men! We need to love Muslims and all other people, including by telling them the truth, and to never back down, just like the prophets.
2. Those who will find this teaching (to please God rather than people) especially challenging include:
 - a. Those who want to be thought well of, by the world or by people in respected religious roles.
 - i. **Questions:**
 1. Do you believe in your heart that if you “do everything the right way”, you will somehow be able to win the praises of religious leaders and be respected by people around you, and avoid being rejected and excluded?
 2. Do you believe it is possible for you to diplomatically “finesse” your way into avoiding persecution from the world or from the religious establishment?
 - b. Conflict avoiders.
 - i. The Biblical word is for that is “coward”.
 - ii. “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (**Revelation 21:7-8**, NKJV)
 - c. Those who struggle with Jesus’ commands to evangelize the lost around us, and to spread the message all over the world (**Matthew 28:18-20**, **Mark 16:15-16**)
 - i. Pray for boldness and courage. That we might fear God and not men; and that we might strive to please God and not men.

- d. Those who want to avoid real *iron-sharpening-iron* discipling relationships with other Christians.
- i. “Speaking the truth in love” to one another is always appropriate (**Ephesians 4:15**).
 - ii. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” (**Proverbs 27:17**, NKJV)
 - iii. The Christian life is *not* just finding a nice comfortable group of people to hang out with. The church needs to be a community where we are calling one another higher, to obey everything that Jesus commanded.
 - iv. In my opinion, the sisters in our group are doing a better job than the brothers in this area. They have demonstrated that they are willing to engage in uncomfortable discussions with each other, to sharpen each other spiritually.
 - v. This is *not* about pecking at each other like chickens in a pen; nor forming a “circular firing squad” where we gang up on and attack individuals! We need to love one another and be respectful of each other as we engage in uncomfortable discussions.
 1. However, I heard something disturbing recently: that there are some people in our group who see things in my life that they feel should be addressed...but they are *reluctant* to bring up those things with me directly. *This is not good!*
 2. We all have our individual strengths and weaknesses. We all (including myself) need feedback from others, to hear the truth about our lives.
 3. “Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.” (**Psalms 141:5**, NKJV)