Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Every single one of us will have one or more loved ones who do not yet believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. For you and me, *that* Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is obvious and it is what gives our lives meaning and purpose; He is our greatest joy. But for them, Jesus is either liar, lunatic, or loser, and they simply do not need Him. And it is heart-breaking to know this about our loved ones. It doesn’t matter how hard we try to answer their objections or to explain Jesus and the Bible, they just refuse to believe.

But there will be some of us who have had loved ones like this come to faith. After a short time or a long time of praying and sharing, they submitted themselves to the Lordship of Jesus and acknowledged Him as their Saviour. Hallelujah!

So of course, the question is, why do some believe and not others? And why have they believed *now* and not earlier? Well, this is the dilemma of unbelief. It is addressed in this passage and it is very important that we understand what the Bible has to say about unbelief, because unbelief ultimately reveals the glory and grace of God.

But as we consider this passage we will also see something of the humanity of Jesus, and we will see that the death of Jesus is absolutely essential to God’s plan of salvation, and we will see why we must tell others that Jesus is the Saviour they need.

And we will see all this as we move through the three major sections of this passage: They are the question of the Greeks and Jesus’ response, the voice of the Father and the various interpretations, and finally an explanation of unbelief and a summary of Jesus’ public ministry.

1. So we begin with **the question of the Greeks** and **Jesus’ response** from vv20-28a.
   1. Ch. 12 marks the **end of John’s account of Jesus’ *public* ministry**. With ch. 13 we move into Jesus’ private ministry with His disciples. His public ministry started way back in ch. 1 with His baptism and the calling of His disciples. We then read about the seven great miracle signs and the seven discourses or talks of Jesus. And this passage brings the public ministry of Jesus to a conclusion and gives us some very sad commentary on how it was received by the Jewish people.
   2. But this summary actually begins with some people who are not Jews. For in v20 we learn that some **Greeks** had also come to Jerusalem for the feast. And these Greeks followed the Jewish religion but they were not circumcised.
      1. Now as you know, we are in the week before Jesus was crucified. And an event took place during that week that John does not mention but the other Gospels do. It is that Jesus cleared the temple. And the reason He did this was because the court of the Gentiles (Non-Jews) had been turned into a marketplace for buying and selling. He said to the Jewish leaders, “*Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers*.” The Court of the Gentiles was as far into the temple as Non-Jews, which would have included these Greeks, were allowed. And Jesus had acted to open up that court for its proper purpose. So it is possible that this event is what led to the request of these Greeks; they wanted to see the One who had acted on their behalf.
      2. But whatever the reason, they approach **Philip** and say to him, “*Sir, we wish to see Jesus*.” We are told that Philip was from Bethsaida in Galilee and that he then went and told Andrew about this, and that they both took this request to Jesus. Philip and Andrew are the only disciples with Greek names; the rest of them had Hebrew names. Bethsaida in Galilee was also a place where the majority population was Greek. So this is probably why Philip was approached first. And why Philip **took the request to Andrew** is probably because any contact between Jesus and Greeks at this moment would have been highly inflammatory in the eyes of the Jewish leaders. Later in Acts, one of the reasons why the Apostle Paul is arrested was because of an allegation that he brought Greeks into the temple. So we can easily imagine Philip thinking to himself, Oh man, what do I do with this request? I know! I’ll see what Andrew thinks. And I realize that all of that is just speculation. John just gives us the bare facts and the end result is that Andrew and Philip bring this request to Jesus.
   3. Now, interestingly, we do not know if Jesus then received these Greeks. What we read in v23 is that He answered Andrew and Philip but what He went on to say and what happened next, we read in v29, was heard and seen by “*the crowd*.” What is clear is that **this request was a massively important moment for Jesus**. Three times now, in John 2:4, 7:30, and 8:20, Jesus has said, “*My hour has not yet come*.” But this request from these Greeks leads Jesus to say, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*.”
      1. But we have been prepped for this moment, if you like, by things Jesus has been saying in recent chapters. In ch. 10, as He talked about being the Good Shepherd; He explained that He had “other sheep” that He was going to bring into the fold; meaning that soon Gentiles would join Jews in the church of Christ. And in ch. 11, John explained that Jesus would die not only for Israel, “*but also to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad*.”
      2. You see, the OT is about God’s covenant and salvation relationship with the Jews. But in the NT, that covenant and salvation relationship opens up to include Jew *and Gentile*. And it is as this request to see Him is made by some Greeks that Jesus realizes that the OT time is over and the NT time must begin. This truly is a pivotal moment in salvation history. And it is a moment that you and I, with most if not all of us being non-Jews, should be very thankful for!
   4. Well, Jesus continues in vv24-26 to speak about how this NT time begins:
      1. We have this **beautiful parable** in v24 about the need for a grain of wheat to fall into the ground and die in order to bear much fruit. Boys and girls, if a wheat seed just sits on top of the soil it will dry up and crumble. But if you bury that seed in the ground, it will sprout and a shoot of wheat will grow there. And Jesus is picturing Himself as like a seed of wheat. He also must die and go into the ground in order to yield a harvest of Jewish and Gentile believers. And He knows that the time for Him to die and the NT church to grow has come.
      2. And then, in vv25-26, He explains that those who follow Him will also have to ‘die.’ He says, “*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life*.” And what he means by ‘losing your life’ is choosing to honour God before anything or anyone else. This includes, of course, that initial decision to be a follower of Christ, especially when being a follower of Jesus can cost you your life, as it has done for many people in church history. But once that decision is made, there will be many other times when following Christ requires sacrificing things or opportunities or relationships that everyone else enjoys.
      3. One example of this that I have shared with you several times is **Rosaria Butterfield-Champagne**. She was a prominent leader in the LGBT community. But when she became a follower of Christ, she had to end her lesbian relationship and lots of other friendships ended and she lost her job. But she has eternal life!
      4. And I have her permission to tell you this but when our daughter **\_\_\_\_**  moved down to Wellington, she was told that she was a good chance for a 2IC position early this year. Well, two weeks ago she had the interview, which management said was just a formality. But the next day they rang her and said as 2IC she would have to work every second Sunday. Now, \_\_\_\_ had it written in her contract that she would not work Sundays because of her desire to honour the Lord and His commands. So she immediately declined the position and as you can imagine she was devastated because there had been months of anticipation that could have been avoided if this was made clear from the start. So we had phone calls with tears, as you can imagine. But a couple of days later we got the phone call with smiles – she had just been told that they so appreciated her as a hard-worker and a reliable employee, etc, that they would find a way for her to be the 2IC and not have to work on Sundays.
      5. Now, I have not shared this with you to say that if you stick to your principles you will always get the happy ending you want. I said a moment ago that following Jesus can mean being killed or missing out on opportunities or leaving behind things you once enjoyed or seeing relationships end, etc. But what Jesus says in v26 is always true: Whether it be in this life of the next: “*If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him*.” If you put Christ and His commands first, God will honour you.
   5. Well, as we come to v27, it is as if **Jesus realizes the implications** **for** ***himself*** of what He has just been saying. In words that are very much like the words He speaks later in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says, “*Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name*.”
      1. I was talking with someone about this passage the other day and we reflected on **how we often let Jesus’ divinity trump His humanity** in our thinking. Do you know what I mean? Whatever difficulty Jesus faces, we minimize it by saying to ourselves that He was God. So, no big deal, right? But we should not do that. The horrible reality of His approaching arrest and trial and torture and death must have hit Him with the force of a sledgehammer, such that He experienced this soul agony and asked the Father if there was a way out of enduring the cross. But He straight away reminded Himself that this is why He had come to earth and He looked to His Father’s glory.
      2. And congregation, there is a powerful lesson in these words of Jesus for your own trials and suffering. You may respectfully ‘complain’ to God about your circumstances, just as Job did and Habakkuk did and the Psalmist did, many times. You are allowed to ask God, Why? You are allowed to seek relief from trouble. But as you do that, pray, Not my will be done but yours. May you be glorified, O God!
2. Well, that brings us to the second major section, which is vv28b-37a, where we see **the voice of the Father** and **various interpretations**.
   1. We read that **Jesus’ prayer was immediately answered** as a voice came from heaven, saying, “*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again*.” And then from v29, we read that some in the crowd thought it was thunder but others thought that an angel had spoken.
      1. Back in v16 we read about the disciples not understanding the significance of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey until after He rose. Well, this is another of those moments. Later on they remembered this moment and understood that it was the Father speaking from heaven. But they were so trapped in their unbelief at this moment that there was not even any room in their thinking for the possibility that it could be the Father. So they kind of wrote it off as thunder or an angel.
   2. But Jesus then **explained** the significance of this moment in v30. And we should understand His words as this voice coming *more* for their sake than for His. The voice of His Father would have been a great encouragement for Jesus, but it was something that those who heard it could later remember as part of understanding who Jesus is.
   3. In v32 Jesus states that that **He will die by being “*lifted up from the earth***” and that this is how He will “*draw all people to Himself*.” And the crowd questioned this because they understood various OT prophecies as teaching that Messiah would come and establish an *earthly* and *eternal* kingdom in Jerusalem. But they were mistaken. It was not then and it is not now the intention of Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Jesus shall rule in the new heavens and the new earth after Judgment Day. But at that moment Jesus was speaking of His crucifixion, as we see in v33.
   4. And then from v35, Jesus responds to their question by repeating what He has already said several times about **walking in the light**, which is basically a call to believe in Himself as the light of the world. And then we read that He departed and hid Himself from the people. Why? We are told in v37a: “*Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him*.” What a tragic postscript. At the end of Jesus’ three year public ministry, among His own people, He is rejected.It is exactly as John told us at the beginning of His Gospel: “*He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him*.”
3. Well, from vv38-50 we get **an explanation of this unbelief** and then **a summary of Jesus’ public ministry**.
   1. And here we come to the question we asked at the start of the sermon about why some people do not choose to believe.
      1. The unbelief of the Jews of Jesus’ day is explained in vv38-41. We see from v38 that “*they still did not believe in Him, so that the word* *spoken* *by* *Isaiah might be fulfilled*.”
         1. And then we have these quotes from **Isaiah 53** and the passage we read earlier in **Isaiah 6**. Back then, Isaiah was told to go and preach to the people of Israel, but that they would not listen to him. And the same thing would later happen with Jesus and His preaching; the people would not believe.
         2. And look at v39. We have to see what is being made very plain here: The unbelief of the Jews of Jesus’ day was not just because they chose not to believe but because they ***could not*** believe. Do you see difference? They were not *able* to believe. For them, belief in Christ was *not possible*. And this is because, as v40 explains, God “*blinded their eyes and hardened their heart*.”
         3. So in relation to the Jews of Jesus’ day, God was sovereignly in charge of their belief or unbelief. And this magnified His glory and served His good purpose. He was not a powerless victim in this matter but Almighty God.
   2. So what about today then? Is God still sovereign in salvation today?
      1. And it is really quite foolish of us to even ask this question because God does not and cannot change. Nevertheless, turn with me to **Romans 9:15** (p.945). Quoting from Exodus 33, we read that God said “*to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."* *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills*.” So at all times and in every age, salvation is always about God choosing either to have mercy or to harden. That is Paul’s major point in Romans 9. But Paul continues then with the obvious question in v19: “*You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?*"” But Paul then answers this question in v20: “*But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honoured use and another for dishonourable use*?” And there you have it in its glorious simplicity, congregation. When it comes to salvation, God is the potter and human beings are the clay. And God is free to choose some to salvation and to harden others in their unbelief.
      2. So many people today **have the idea that God owes all people either the gift of salvation or at least the chance of salvation**. And since salvation is by grace, then God owes everyone His grace. But you see, that way of thinking is the result of confusing God’s justice and God’s grace. Grace is undeserved by its very nature. As guilty sinners, what we deserve is God’s justice; we all deserve condemnation. So those God hardens and condemns are getting what they deserve. But those God chooses to save are not getting what they deserve.
      3. So the end result of what we have called the dilemma of unbelief is where Paul ended up in Romans 11 – doxology! “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever*.” We cry out, Thank you, Lord, for your amazing grace to me!
   3. And what we do with this is not try and work out who God has chosen and who He has hardened. That is God’s business. A few moments ago I quoted John 1:11 in reference to the Jews not receiving Jesus. But v12 goes on to say, “*But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.*”
      1. In vv42-43 we read that some of the Jewish leaders *did* believe in Jesus. But they still feared the Pharisees. Their faith and their allegiance to Jesus was not yet total.
      2. And then in vv44-50 we have a summary of statements made by Jesus throughout His public ministry. We know that He had departed and hid Himself from the Jews. So He didn’t just pop back into the city to cry out a few more things. I won’t give you the cross references, but each of these statements are quotes or summaries of what Jesus has already said in ch’s 1-12. And they add up to a call to believe in Him.
      3. And it is fitting that we end with these words. Yes, we know that God is sovereign in salvation. Hallelujah! But what we need to do is to tell people is that if they repent of their sins and believe that Jesus died on the cross for them, they will be saved.

Brothers and Sisters, I began the sermon speaking about how heart breaking it is to have loved ones who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. But during the week I read about a study which revealed that nearly half of all self-professed Christian millennials believe it is wrong to share their faith with close friends and family members of different beliefs. On average, these millennials had four close, non-believing loved ones – four eternal souls – that would not hear the gospel from them. Could that be you, perhaps? Do you have four close family members that have not heard the gospel from you? Oh sure, you are kind to them. And they know you go to church. But have you shared the gospel with them? And each of us must ask ourselves this question: How many people have we spent hours with, even calling them friends, without them ever hearing about sin, eternity, Jesus Christ, or hell from us? **Romans 10:14** says, “How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard?” The way that the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Christ is through the preaching and sharing of the gospel. And that is where you come in. May God help us to be those who share the gospel. Amen.