

# John 12:34-41

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon on John 12:34-41 explores the themes of deceit, the nature of Christ, and the importance of faith and love among believers.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 73:27, Isaiah 50:2, Isaiah 59:2, Ezekiel 18:32, Hosea 4:6, Luke 13:34, John 12:35-36, John 12:38, John 12:40, Romans 1:28

**Topics:** "Unbelief And Faith", "Christian Discipleship"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the deceitfulness of the Jews who questioned Christ's statement about being lifted up, revealing their lack of understanding and deliberate wrongdoings. Despite Christ's miracles, many still did not believe in Him, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. The unbelief of some was foretold, not caused, by the prophets, showing the unerring truth of Scripture. Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of holding fast to God, caring for our souls, showing love towards others, and bearing each other's burdens, following the law of Christ to receive His promised blessings.

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## Transcript

The people answered Him, We have heard out of the Law that Christ abides for ever; and how do you say, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?

1. Deceit is a thing easily detected, and weak, though it be daubed outside with ten thousand colors. For as those who whitewash decayed walls, cannot by the plastering make them sound, so too those who lie are easily found out, as in fact was the case here with the Jews. For when Christ said to them, If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto Me; We have heard, says one of them, out of the Law, that Christ remains forever; and how do you say, that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man? Even they then knew that Christ was some Immortal One, and had life without end. And therefore they also knew what He meant; for often in Scripture the Passion and the Resurrection are mentioned in the same place. Thus Isaiah puts them together, saying, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter Isaiah 53:7, and all that follows. David also in the second Psalm, and in many other places, connects these two things. The Patriarch too after saying, He lay down, He couched as a lion, adds, And as a lion's cub, who shall raise Him up? Genesis 49:9 He shows at once the Passion and the Resurrection. But these men when they thought to silence Him, and to show that He was not the Christ, confessed by this very circumstance that the Christ remains forever. And observe their evil dealing; they said not, We have heard that Christ neither suffers nor is crucified, but that He remains forever. Yet even this which has been mentioned, would have

been no real objection, for the Passion was no hindrance to His Immortality. Hence we may see that they understood many of the doubtful points, and deliberately went wrong. For since He had before spoken about death, when they now heard in this place the, be lifted up, they guessed that death was referred to. Then they said, Who is this Son of Man? This too they did deceitfully. Think not, I pray, says one, that we say this concerning you, assert not that we oppose you through enmity, for, lo, we know not concerning whom you speak, and still we declare our opinion. What then does Christ? To silence them, and to show that the Passion is no impediment to His enduring forever, He says,

John 12:35

Yet a little while is the light with you.

Signifying that His death was a removal; for the light of the sun is not destroyed, but having retired for a while appears again.

Walk while you have the light.

Of what season does He here speak? Of the whole present life, or of the time before the Crucifixion? I for my part think of both, for on account of His unspeakable lovingkindness, many even after the Crucifixion believed. And He speaks these things to urge them on to the faith, as He also did before, saying, Yet a little while I am with you. John 7:33

He that walks in darkness knows not whither he goes.

How many things, for instance, even now do the Jews, without knowing what they do, but walking as though they were in darkness? They think that they are going the right way, when they are taking the contrary; keeping the Sabbath, respecting the Law and the observances about meats, yet knowing not whither they walk. Wherefore He said,

John 12:36

Walk in the light, that you may become children of the light.

That is, My children. Yet in the beginning the Evangelist says, Were born, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God John 1:13; that is, of the Father; while here Himself is said to beget them; that you may understand that the operation of the Father and the Son is One. Jesus having spoken these things, departed from them, and did hide Himself.

Why does He now hide Himself? They took not up stones against Him, nor did they blaspheme Him in any such manner as before; why then did He hide Himself? Walking in men's hearts, He knew that their wrath was fierce, though they said nothing; He knew it boiling and murderous, and waited not till it issued into action, but hid Himself, to allay their ill-will. Observe how the Evangelist has alluded to this feeling; he has immediately added,

John 12:37

Though He had done so many miracles, they believed not on Him.

2. What so many? So many as the Evangelist has omitted. And this is clear also from what follows. For when He had retired, and given in, and had come to them again, He speaks with them in a lowly manner,

saying, He that believes in Me, believes not on Me, but on Him that sent Me. John 12:44 Observe what He does. He begins with humble and modest expressions, and betakes Himself to the Father; then again He raises His language, and when He sees that they are exasperated, He retires; then He comes to them again, and again begins with words of humility. And where has He done this? Nay, where has He not done it? See, for instance, what He says at the beginning, As I hear, I judge. John 5:30 Then in a loftier tone, As the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them, so also the Son quickens whom He will John 5:21; again, I judge you not, there is another that judges. Then again He retires. Then coming to Galilee, Labor not, He says, for the meat that perishes John 6:27; and after having said great things of Himself, that He came down from Heaven, that He gives eternal life, He again withdraws Himself. And He comes in the Feast of Tabernacles also, and does the same. And one may see Him continually thus varying His teaching, by His presence, by His absence, by lowly, by high discourses. Which He also did here. Though He had done so many miracles, it says, they believed not on Him.

John 12:38

That the saying of Esaias might be fulfilled which he spoke, Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? And again,

John 12:39-41

They could not believe, it says, because that Esaias said, You shall hear with your ears, and not understand. These things he said, when he saw His glory, and spoke of Him.

Here again observe, that the because, and spoke, refer not to the cause of their unbelief, but to the event. For it was not because Isaiah spoke, that they believed not; but because they were not about to believe, that he spoke. Why then does not the Evangelist express it so, instead of making the unbelief proceed from the prophecy, not the prophecy from the unbelief? And farther on he puts this very thing more positively, saying, Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said. He desires hence to establish by many proofs the unerring truth of Scripture, and that what Isaiah foretold fell not out otherwise, but as he said. For lest any one should say, Wherefore did Christ come? Knew he not that they would give no heed to him? he introduces the Prophets, who knew this also. But He came that they might have no excuse for their sin; for what things the Prophet foretold, he foretold as certainly to be; since if they were not certainly to be, he could not have foretold them; and they were certainly to be, because these men were incurable.

And if, they could not, is put, instead of, they would not, do not marvel, for He says also in another place, He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. Matthew 19:12 So in many places He is wont to term choice, power. Again, The world cannot hate you, but Me it hates. John 7:7 This one may even see observed in common conversation; as when a man says, I cannot love this or that person, calling the force of his will, power. And again, this or that person cannot be a good man. And what says the Prophet? If the Ethiopian shall change his skin, or the leopard his spots, this people also shall be able to do good, having learned evil. Jeremiah 13:23, Septuagint He says not that the doing of virtue is impossible to them, but that because they will not, therefore they cannot. And by what he says the Evangelist means, that it was impossible for the Prophet to lie; yet it was not on that account impossible that they should believe. For it was possible, even had they believed, that he should remain true; since he would not have prophesied these things if they had been about to believe. Why then, says some one, did he not say so? Because Scripture has certain idiomatic phrases of this kind, and it is needful to make allowance for its laws.

The seethings he spoke when he saw His glory. Whose? The Father's. How then does John speak of the Son? And Paul of the Spirit? Not as confounding the Persons, but as showing that the Dignity is one, they say it. For that which is the Father's is the Son's also, and that which is the Son's is the Spirit's. Yet many things God spoke by Angels, and no one says, as the Angel spoke, but how? as God spoke. Since what has been said by God through the ministry of Angels would be of God; yet not therefore is what is of God, of the Angels also. But in this place John says that the words are the Spirit's.

And spoke of Him. What spoke he? I saw the Lord sitting upon a high throne Isaiah 6:1, and what follows. Therefore he there calls glory, that vision, the smoke, the hearing unutterable Mysteries, the beholding the Seraphim, the lightning which leaped from the throne, against which those powers could not look. And spoke of Him. What said he? That he heard a voice, saying, Whom shall I send? Who shall go? And I said, Here am I, send me. And He said, You shall hear with your ears, and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see, and not perceive. Isaiah 6:8-10 For,

John 12:40

He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, lest they at any time should see with their eyes, and understand with their heart.

Here again is another question, but it is not so if we rightly consider it. For as the sun dazzles the eyes of the weak, not by reason of its proper nature, so it is with those who give not heed to the words of God. Thus, in the case of Pharaoh, He is said to have hardened his heart, and so it is with those who are at all contentious against the words of God. This is a peculiar mode of speech in Scripture, as also the, He gave them over unto a reprobate mind Romans 1:28, and the, He divided them to the nations, that is, allowed, permitted them to go. For the writer does not here introduce God as Himself working these things, but shows that they took place through the wickedness of others. For, when we are abandoned by God, we are given up to the devil, and when so given up, we suffer ten thousand dreadful things. To terrify the hearer, therefore, the writer says, He hardened, and gave over. For to show that He does not only not give us over, but does not even leave us, except we will it, hear what He says, Do not your iniquities separate between Me and you? Isaiah 59:2, Septuagint. And again, They that go far away from You shall perish. Psalm 73:27, Septuagint And Hosea says, You have forgotten the law of your God, and I will also forget you Hosea 4:6, Septuagint; and He says Himself also in the Gospels, How often would I have gathered your children -- and you would not. Luke 13:34 Esaias also again, I came, and there was no man; I called, and there was none to hearken. Isaiah 50:2, Septuagint These things He says, showing that we begin the desertion, and become the causes of our perdition; for God not only desires not to leave or to punish us, but even when He punishes, does it unwillingly; I will not, He says, the death of a sinner, so much as that he should turn and live. Ezekiel 18:32, Septuagint Christ also mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem, as we also do over our friends.

3. Knowing this, let us do all so as not to remove from God, but let us hold fast to the care of our souls, and to the love towards each other; let us not tear our own members, (for this is the act of men insane and beside themselves,) but the more we see any ill disposed, the more let us be kind to them. Since we often see many persons suffering in their bodies from difficult or incurable maladies, and cease not to apply remedies. What is worse than gout in foot or hand? Are we therefore to cut off the limbs? Not at all, but we use every means that the sufferer may enjoy some comfort, since we cannot get rid of the disease. This also let us do in the case of our brethren, and, even though they be diseased incurably, let us continue to tend them, and let us bear one another's burdens. So shall we fulfill the law of Christ, and obtain the

promised good things, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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