

Crossings Community Church
Matt Powell
Series: John: The Way to Joy
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John 12:37-50

It's good to be here with you guys this morning. I want to share something with you that may feel a little odd, but allow me to connect the dots. I promise I'll do my best to do so. This was laid on my heart this week on Thursday as I was praying and wrestling with this Scripture and this sermon. I want to make this statement to you: I desire more homes, more families, more hearts, more minds to join what God is doing at Crossings Community Church. I desire growth, most simply stated.

Now as soon as I say that, I know there are all kinds of reactions to that. It's all sort of different things. Do you know what? As I was thinking about it this week (we could never put this experiment to the test in a healthy way, but...), I would bet in this room, there are some of you who hear that and respond in a certain way that another individual in this room would be completely shocked you're responding in that way.

I think there are a couple of reasons you respond, in all kinds of ways, to hearing somebody say "I desire growth." One is we all bring a story and experience to this room this morning. I tell you, that's big with me. Just to give you an authentic kind of *Matt* moment. In my journey, I have experienced a lot of things I have felt were unhealthy in a megachurch environment.

I, in my own little internal pendulum, swung way over in the other direction. I've had to journey personally on finding what healthy, biblical church growth looks like. That's been a huge journey for me as a pastor, as an individual, based on my experience. All of you bring experience and your journey to the table, and you're all in a different place as you hear that statement and you process it.

Another reason it might surprise some (especially if you're new with us) that I would say is we are not an *attractional* church at Crossings Community Church. Let me explain what I mean by that. We're not a church that works to make Sunday morning be appetizing above all else to the community. That's not priority number one for us. I don't come, and I don't preach a sermon and think in my head, "I want this message to be the most palatable message it can be for all who come in."

Chris doesn't come up here on Sunday morning and think, "Okay, I have to take these top 40 hits, and I want to spin them for Jesus on Sunday morning so the community will come in and they'll say, 'Hey, man. I love that song. I want to be here.'" We don't do that. Although Daniel himself is very entertaining, he doesn't work in our children's ministry and family ministry back there to make that children's ministry the most entertaining thing anybody can find in this community.

It's not who we are. Rather I come on Sunday, and I do the best I can amidst God's grace to give an unfiltered, biblical sermon. Chris comes up here, and he prepares each week, and he prays.

His desire is to create and facilitate, led by the Spirit, an environment where we're responding to God for who he is and what he does.

Daniel (praise the Lord) works hard to equip our volunteers to find and implement a curriculum that our children begin to see the Bible in their own age-appropriate ways. They begin to understand it. God is doing amazing things here at Crossings Community Church, and I'm blessed to be in a position that I get to hear a lot of the stories. Maybe some of you don't get to hear... No, *all* of you do not get to hear all of what I do, and that's a shame.

You don't get to hear about the stories that just this week I was hearing about what God is doing amidst our small groups, at Financial Peace University, what God did and what he is now doing amidst that group that's meeting, what he is doing amidst the men and the women who are gathering independently throughout the week, what he is doing amidst the children who are on the other side of this building.

I've seen it with my own eyes. I hear it in the families. I hear the stories of parents feeling more equipped to have spiritual conversations. Rather than it being a Sunday-to-Sunday thing, it's a seven-days-a-week kind of thing by God's grace. I hear stories of people connecting things in sermons like I never... That was never on my mind. It was never my intention. "I don't know how you got that, but praise the Lord." God is working, and he is doing amazing things.

When I say I desire growth, what I'm not saying is, "I desire to make this the most comfortable, palatable place for the Katy community to come." Rather I desire that amidst our obedience to the vision God has given for his church to proclaim the Word of God, to worship him fully, to give our children his Word and see them grow in it, we see the community come, and they experience the same transformation I see happening in our homes. That's what I mean by, "I desire growth."

You see, this week as I was looking at John's gospel and specifically chapter 12 and I was seeing the way Jesus handled his ministry, time after time, we see crowds gathering around Jesus, crowds coming to Jesus. Here in John, chapter 12, we're in one of those spots where a group of people, a crowd, has come. They've gathered, and they've sought him out. Why did they seek him out? Because of the displays of glory they had seen in Jesus, maybe most namely and most recently the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Right?

They're there, and the crowd is there. "We want more. We want to know what this is about." What does Jesus say? "Come and die." It's the message. Jesus wanted the crowds, and he gathered the multitudes, but he never presented a message that was, "Here's what it takes to be comfortable, and here's how it's going to feel good." Rather what he did was he gave the gospel in all of its most difficult nuances and challenges but yet beautiful with every word he spoke.

I want Crossings Community Church to be about that. A crowd gathers. This morning as we finish chapter 12, we're finishing his public ministry. We're completing the public ministry of Jesus. These words as we looked at chapter 12, we finish today, but I want to put it in the context of this big conversation we have been looking at in chapter 12. They're his final words in his public ministry.

With that crowd gathered, they say, "What do we do?" They come there. He says, "Come and die, and in dying, you'll find life." Come and die. Then after letting them know all of this... All of this is for one purpose. The purpose isn't you. Remember Jesus said that? "It wasn't that I'm doing all of this, I live this life, I'm going through all of this sacrifice so you might benefit. No, I'm doing all of this for one purpose above all, and that purpose is to glorify the Father."

Then he shares with them, "In this, in this journey as I go and as I glorify God, judgment is complete, and victory is secured." Now the challenge to us today amidst all of that, now empowered by that grace... The same grace that proclaimed us as righteous, that judgment is complete. The same grace that defeated Satan gave us that victory. That same grace. Live your life as light empowered by that grace. That's where we landed last week.

This brings us where we are today, beginning in verse 37. I'd invite you to make your way with me there. I want to read through this and look at it, look at John's sort of commentary we have here in a few verses, and then we'll really camp out on how Jesus continues this monologue. This is verse 37 of chapter 12. ***"Though he had done so many signs before them..."***

I think what's in the mind of John and what would have been in the mind of anyone around at this moment would have been Lazarus. That's this high-point moment in Jesus' ministry. Penultimate, right? The ultimate moment is coming in the death and resurrection, but in their minds was the fact that Jesus, amidst all of the signs he had done, had raised the dead man to life.

"...they still did not believe in him, so that the word..." Why was it this disbelief was continuing amidst all of the signs, miraculous things, Jesus was doing? John tells us, ***"...so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled."*** Let's read this quote from Isaiah. It says, ***"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"***

That's a quote from Isaiah 53, verse 1. If you remember Isaiah 53, it's that beautiful, prophetic word about the suffering servant, the one who is going to come, and he is going to take on our transgressions. In his stripes, we're healed. The fact that God, the Lord, delighted to crush him. In him, we have life.

What John is doing as he writes this and as he quotes from Isaiah 53:1 is he is calling to mind for us these words. He is reminding for us, and in the Jews, man, it would have been *that* quick. As soon as he quotes that, it's like a light bulb goes off. They understand the complete context of what's going on. I want to read just a tiny bit of this to you because we don't have it memorized like many of them would have.

"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Go home and read the whole thing. It's such a beautiful passage of Scripture and such a great word that really can grab us and remind us of the power of what was accomplished on the cross of Christ. I think that's why this quote is there. He is reminding us in John, "This is what's happening." Remember six days from this moment is the cross. We're in the Passion Week. The public ministry of Jesus is coming to end.

All of the magnitude of that is being called to light here as this quotation from Isaiah 53 is shared. We have another quotation. Keep reading. **"Therefore they could not believe."** Remember he is talking about all of those who saw all the signs. They saw the healing. They saw one raised from death to life, and yet they didn't believe. **"Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said..."**

This is a quote of Isaiah 6:10. **"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 them."** Isaiah, chapter 6, is another incredible passage. Remember Isaiah is there, and he sees one like the Son of Man lifted up before him. The train of his robe fills the temple. In other words, the glory of this one who is lifted up before him is all-encompassing.

The ground shakes at the voice of him who is lifted up, and the seraphim (the burning ones) are at each side of this one who is lifted up who is like the Son of Man. Isaiah responds, **"Woe is me!"** "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips." Immediately the seraphim come down, bringing the coal, offering the forgiveness and the atonement. What a great passage of Scripture.

Then right after that in Isaiah, chapter 6, **"Whom shall I send...?"** I always think that's such a comical passage because the voice of the Lord (or one like the Son of Man) up there says, **"Whom shall I send...?"** For all we know when we read that, there's no one else present but Isaiah. I don't know if Isaiah looked around and said, "I guess that has to be me," or if he just responded with, "Okay, yes, I'll go." Either way, he said, **"Here I am! Send me."**

Then the words of the Lord said there, "They're not going to listen. Their hearts are going to be hard. It's not going to feel fruitful." That's what's being quoted here. Amidst the reasoning here that shows us why, even though all of these miraculous things were taking place, they didn't believe...

There's another thing I want to see as we pick up on the theme that's going to carry through the end of chapter 12 here, and that is the Word of God is truth. The Word of God is truth! What God did through Isaiah's words some 800 years before the birth of Jesus, they're coming true right now. They're being quoted here. It is real. It is true. The Word of the Lord is true, and I think that is a subtle theme that's building here as John gives this commentary before we get to the words of Jesus.

Verse 41: **"Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him..."** There are a few words that are a little bit troubling here. Keep reading, and you'll see why. **"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."**

We don't know really how authentic their belief was. I look back, and I think about Romans, chapter 10, verse 9. "**...if you confess with your mouth...and believe...you will be saved.**" My first gut reaction as I look at this is that their fear, their inability to confess, would leave them at that moment of judgment surprised to say, "I'm not one of your sheep."

We don't know for sure, but what we do know for sure is the fear of man stunted what was for them here. Look at verse 43. "**For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.**" They loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God! Isn't that a constant obstacle we face living this life following Jesus? We get to Jesus' words in verse 44.

Lori makes fun of me a little bit because every time we take Bethany (my oldest daughter) and we'll drop her off if it's a school function or off at a friend's house or something like that, I will nearly always tell her (the reason I do is that my dad always told me), "If you need anything, you call me. Wherever you are or whatever is going on, I will come pick you up. I'll come get you. Whatever you're in, whatever mess, whatever trouble, whatever it is, if you feel uncomfortable, you call, and I will be there. I'll come get you."

Then I go on with different things, you know, like, "Don't play with firearms." There's a little speech there that I go through when she is departing, and that's probably the part Lori makes fun of the most. Then I also kind of give some Freudian jokes about if anybody lays a hand on her in any way what I'll do to them.

I say it's Freudian because I don't know how much is true and how much is joking. I just pray we're never in that situation where I'm really tested to find out, "Am I kidding, or am I not?" I give her this speech of, "Okay, this is it. This is what you need. You're going out into the real world here," even if it's just to a friend's house. "You need to hear these important things so I can get you out of whatever mess you're in."

Jesus is at that place where it's like he knows not only what the next six days are going to consist of, but he knows in terms of his outward proclamation of truth to the multitudes, to the crowds, this is it! It's over. As he thinks about that, I love the emotion. I think it's so rare as you look at the Gospels to see this verbiage.

You don't need to follow me here. I'm just going to make these points. You look back just in this dialogue we've been studying in chapter 12. You look back at verse 23, and it says, "**And Jesus answered them...**" You look back at verse 30, and it says, "**Jesus answered...**" Verse 35: "**So Jesus said to them...**"

You get to verse 44 here at the end of this, and it says, "**And Jesus cried out...**" That's different. Literally translated it's, "He shouted." Jesus, the ultimate authority, is raising his voice with passion and authority. When Jesus raises his voice, I think our ears need to perk up a little bit. He cried out. Let's keep reading.

"And Jesus cried out and said..." I want to emphasize a few words, and then I'll show you why. **"Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me."** Okay, see this deflection in the beginning. He wants the connection between the Father and him to be seen and understood. **"And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."** Now here comes some transition.

"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. 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. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

Do you feel that point, the theme, what he is trying to drive home to them in the beginning as he is finishing this? He wants them to understand, "Hey, the one who sent me, I am connected to Yahweh." There are Greeks and Jews who are going to be hearing this, but the Jews... "Yeah, I'm the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one who parted the sea, the one who held the sun still as Joshua's army was fighting, the one who brought down the walls of Jericho. I am one with Yahweh, the God of Israel. Everything I'm doing, everything I'm saying, is from him."

He wants them to get that connection, but as he begins hitting that, he makes the transition to the importance of his Word. Did you hear that? I tried to make it really obvious. He consistently repeats, "What I say," "My Word," "His commandment," "What I speak." He wants them to hear that it's his Word that will remain. He is about to depart. It's his Word that's going to shine the light in the darkness. It's his Word that's going to bring a constant emanation of his presence when his body is no longer there. He wants them to begin to get that.

I think we can lump in the beginning of what he says in verse 23 and all the way through, and we can say Jesus here in these kind of closing words of chapter 12 is saying, "If you get anything..." I think we see the emotion, that climactic emotion there in verse 44, right? "If you get anything from all I've been saying, all I've done, forget about the miracles, but listen to this. Come and die, and in your dying, find life." Remember? That was for us a couple of weeks ago.

We looked at Romans, chapter 8, and said, **"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."** We're called to such a focused eternal perspective that everything else seems to fade away into the background in our lives. That's the invitation he is extending to them. Focus so deeply on the things that are of Jesus, the eternal things, that everything else seems meaningless to you. It's a lifestyle which has the aroma of death and yet the taste of joy.

Then last Sunday as we looked at verses 27 to 36, come and live empowered by the grace found in your completed judgment and secured victory. We proclaim the truth based on God's Word here that Satan has no power to do anything in our lives of eternal ramification. He can rough us up. He can influence. He can try to influence. He can try to oppress. He is there, and he is working, but he is defeated.

Judgment is rendered, and victory is secured. Those of us who are in Christ, we've placed our faith in him. Our victory over sin has been won. Our victory over the evil schemes of Satan has been won. This doesn't remove that daily battle we are in, but it's not a battle that says, "Try hard enough or work hard enough in order to win." Rather, the battle is walk deep enough in his grace to see our victory.

That brings us to where we are today, these final red letters of Jesus. Come and find the presence of Christ through the living Word of God. See, with his public ministry coming to an end, he is telling them how they're going to accomplish all he has called them to. You see, at this point in their minds, some of them are still confused. Right?

"I thought he was going to be a king who ruled greater than David. He was going to rule in a political throne. Then we were going to be able to follow him like that, but that doesn't seem to be what he is telling us. He is beginning to tell us he is going to leave. He has called us to do all of these things we thought we were going to do with him here, but now we're finding out he is not going to be here. So how are we going to accomplish these things with him not here?"

Jesus is saying, "My Word remains. It's my Word that's going to empower you to be able to come and die and find life. It's my Word that's going to give you the ability to find grace, live in grace, and be light. My Word remains." As we get later in John's gospel, we'll see the entrance and the relationship of how the Holy Spirit comes in to play. We'll talk about that when we get there, but here's where I want to stop. Here's the reason I don't want to talk about that this morning.

I think at this moment, we need to understand the Holy Spirit is not a genie in a bottle. He is not a magic wand we reach for hoping for something miraculous to happen or something mysterious. He works amidst the Word of God. The Holy Spirit works amidst, through, the Word of God. The Holy Spirit does not do anything contradictory to the Word of God. As we're building a foundation here on how we do life since Jesus has ascended, it's based on the foundation of the Word of God.

That's what he is telling these folks. "This is what remains. If you want to walk in my presence and know me, it's through my Word. If you want to live putting your flesh to death and finding the abundant life, it's through my Word. If you want to understand what it means to stand victorious over the Evil One and over sin, it's by standing on my Word, being saturated in my presence through my Word."

As Jesus departed, through his death, resurrection, and ascension, the apostles now from where we are, where we sit today, have passed away. They're gone. You can look at Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 19 through 22. It talks about the church being built on a foundation of the apostles' teaching, with the cornerstone being Jesus.

The way we walk deeper in his empowering grace, the way we have a relationship with him, the way we grow in intimacy with him is upon the foundation of his Word. Some of you in here may be in a season of life where you're begging God to do miraculous things. Maybe that's personal. It's in your own health. Maybe it's in your marriage. Maybe it's in your family. Maybe it's in the

church. I know I'm praying asking God to do miraculous things within the church, within some of your lives. I'm asking for that.

We're called in those times to find his presence through communing with him in his Word. It's not about just thinking, "God, do something miraculous. We're going to wait here. You just do this. Would you do this, God?" We're waiting, and we're looking. Rather it's, "God, would you do this miraculous?" as we spend time with him and commune with him and as he is changing our hearts and changing our desires. The way we pray and the things we're asking for are changing and being molded by the power of his Word.

That Holy Spirit we're expecting to come and do something is the one who is changing our hearts as we are reading his Word. Maybe you're in a season of coldness or stagnation. I sit across the table from quite a few individuals who tell me, "I just don't feel a relationship like I used to with Jesus." I'm going to give you a really simple answer, one you'd expect me to give you. We're called to find his presence, to develop intimacy with our Savior through his Word.

That's how we find... That season of stagnation and coldness? If I continued to push and you really were honest with me, you would tell me, "I'm not living a life saturated by the Word of God." I can promise you that! We're called to develop this intimacy, this relationship with him through communing in his presence in his Word.

I'll make this incredibly simple. For my home to be transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, I need to be a person saturated by the Word of God. For your home to be transformed, be transforming by the gospel of Jesus Christ, you need to be a person, a husband, a wife, an individual, who is saturated in the Word of God.

For our neighborhoods to become places that are being transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we need to be so saturated in his Word that that's what comes out of our mouths. The proclamation that overflows in us and comes out as we're at the park or as we're on a walk is his Word. If we want to be a church that has people come in...

Remember the merry-go-round. We're spinning people off around the world, around the city, sent to proclaim the message of Jesus. I believe confidently people are going to come and get on that merry-go-round. As they come, for us to continue to be a church that sees people and homes transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must be a church constructed of men, women, and homes saturated with the Word of God.

I think if Jesus were standing here today and he were reflecting on this moment in John, chapter 12, and he knew everything as he does, aware of every one of our lives (the story of Crossings Community Church, the story of your homes and where you are), I think again he would raise his voice. He would shout in a most authoritative way the Savior of this world could shout, and he would say to us, "Do not let another day of your life pass without spending time in my presence through my Word." That's what he'd say to us here now. I think that is what he is saying to us.

I want to invite you to bow your head and close your eyes. As we respond this morning in prayer, my hope this morning is not that you leave feeling guilty. My hope is that you leave

today feeling empowered, you leave today feeling the freedom. Judgment is complete. Victory is secured. Now here's an invitation. Walk in his presence through his Word.