

Subject: *The Tragedy of Unbelief*

Scripture: *John 12:37-50*

Over and over in the Gospel of John we are encouraged to believe in Christ. We are reminded of the blessing of eternal life that comes to the believer. We have seen before that this gospel was written with that purpose in mind:

John 20:30-31 ³⁰ *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: ³¹ But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

The Gospel of John was written so that we might believe in Christ and be saved. It was also given to warn us about not believing in Christ. Just as faith in Christ brings the greatest blessing, rejection of Christ brings the greatest curse. John began the gospel with the great contrast of those who believed in Christ and those who rejected Him:

John 1:11-12 ¹¹ *He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

In John 12:35-36, Jesus warned the people about walking in darkness. He invited them to believe in Him and walk in the light. He said: “While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light.” This is your opportunity. Do it while you can. The day of opportunity is passing by and nightfall is about to come. In the last part of John 12 Jesus explained why so many people rejected Him and refused to accept God’s gift of eternal life. This widespread unbelief did not take God by surprise, but was in fact predicted in Scripture and it surely came to pass.

THE HUMAN REASONS FOR UNBELIEF

- Unbelievers rejected Christ in spite of all evidence (vs. 37)

We are not surprised that Jesus did many miracles and that these miracles were designed to convince people that He was the Son of God. When Moses was sent to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, he felt so inadequate and God told him that he would work three miracles or signs to convince the people to follow him (Ex. 4:1-9, Moses took a rod that became a serpent and then again it became a rod; Moses hand became like a leper’s hand and then it was instantly healed; the water was poured on the ground and became blood).

These people had actually seen Jesus’ miracles. The Bible calls them “so many miracles.” John only recorded a few of the many miracles Jesus did, as the last verse in this gospel says:

John 21:25 *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*

The word “miracles” is *semeion*, which can be translated signs. These were signs clearly pointing to Jesus as the Son of God. They were miracles with a message. The people had no excuse for not believing in Jesus. They constantly and persistently hardened their hearts against Jesus (“they believed not on him,” – they were not believing on him). What a contrast

this was to Nathanael, one of Christ's first disciples who believed in Jesus after only one proof of His divine ability (Jn. 1:48-50).

- Unbelievers desired man's approval instead of God's (vs. 42-43)

Mentally they believed on Jesus, but they did not truly commit themselves to Him and therefore they did not confess their faith. They loved the approval of men more than the approval of God. They feared men rather than God.

Proverbs 29:25 *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.* The fear of man is a trap that unbelievers fall into. Peer pressure is not just something that teenagers face.

THE DIVINE REASONS FOR UNBELIEF

- Scripture must be fulfilled (vs. 38)

The people did not believe and to confirm that fact John referred to Isaiah 53:1. "Who has believed our report?" refers to the words of Christ that people did not believe. "The arm of the Lord" refers to Christ's mighty works, His miracles.

- God's sovereign judgment must be displayed (vs. 39-40)

Here we see another divine reason given for their unbelief. The people not only *did not believe* in Jesus, but Scripture says they *could not believe* in Him. The reference is to Isaiah 6, where the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of God enthroned in His glory. He heard the angelic creatures crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. Then Isaiah confessed his sin, and God purged His sin and asked, "Who will go for us?" Isaiah responded, "Here am I, send me." Then God told Isaiah what was going to happen through his preaching ministry:

Isaiah 6:9-10⁹ *And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.*¹⁰ *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*

This passage speaks of the judicial act of God in hardening the hearts, stopping up the ears, and closing the eyes of unbelievers. When people refuse to believe, refuse to hear, and refuse to see, then God hardens their hearts, deafens their ears, and blinds their eyes to the truth. This is what happened to Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus. At first Pharaoh hardened his own heart toward God, but after a while God also hardened his heart.

When someone preaches the Gospel two things can happen: the truth can soften the heart and the person can believe and be saved or the truth can harden the heart and the person can reject the truth and be lost forever. It has been said that the same sun that softens the wax also hardens the clay. God hardens the person who hardens himself.

See ***Hebrews 3:7-19***. We find three ideas here. First, God offered rest in the Promised Land. This is a picture of God's rest for our soul. Second, the people rejected God's offer and hardened their hearts in unbelief. Third, God rejected the people and a whole generation died in the wilderness. God said: "Ok, if that's what you want, that's what you'll get."

THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF UNBELIEF

Every person can either believe or not believe, but faith and unbelief have consequences. You are free to choose, but you are not free to choose the consequences of your choice. To believe or not to believe in Christ is no casual matter.

- Unbelievers remain in spiritual darkness (vs. 46)

Jesus came as the image of the Father (God in human flesh). He spoke the Father's words. He was sent to bring light. Those who believe in Him no longer remain in darkness. Those who reject Him are in darkness now and forever.

- Unbelievers face certain judgment (vs. 47-50)

Whoever rejects Christ's words rejects God's words. And whoever rejects God's words will be judged. Two things come into play in this passage. We see the sovereignty of God in hardening the hearts of unbelievers. This is a judicial hardening, a judgment of God upon all who deny Christ and reject Him. We also see the responsibility of every person who stubbornly rejects Christ and refuses to believe in Him.

The evidence that proves Jesus is the Son of God and leads us to put our trust in Him is the same evidence that will condemn us if we refuse to believe in Him.

How can we reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation? Every person who believes in Christ and has eternal life will have no one else to thank but God, and every person who does not believe in Christ and is eternally lost will have no else to blame but himself.