



John 12:34-41

Believe Now While there is Still Time

34 The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of Man?"

35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.

36 "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,

38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

Throughout the teaching of the bible we see two great truths that men have great difficulty reconciles. These are the twin doctrinal pillars of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility. The expedient usually taken by men because they feel they cannot be reconciled is to drive down or eliminate one or the other. Usually they will do this by modifying, ignoring, or even denying the scriptures that teach them, for instance, John Wesley, when presented with scriptures that clearly taught predestination, and even used the word "predestination" was so bold as to reply "*no scripture can prove predestination.*"

But brothers and sisters, these twin truths are a biblical fact and cannot be denied without doing serious damage to what scripture teaches about God, Man, and Salvation. For instance, we see a perfect example of these truths in Joseph's words to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 "*But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*" His brothers were entirely responsible for the evil of selling him into slavery in Egypt, and yet before the were even born God had sovereignly ordained that this would be the means by which His promises to Abraham and His descendents would be fulfilled and their line preserved and grown.

Then there are Peter's words in the Pentecost sermon of Acts 2:22-23 "*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know -- Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.*" Peter pulls no punches, He tells the men of Jerusalem they were responsible for the great evil of putting the Messiah Jesus Christ to death, and yet that was the means

by which God had purposed in the plan of redemption to save sinners, including many of those lawless ones who put the Messiah to death!

Countless example of both of these divine truths are to be found in scripture, including in these verses. And so today, I want us to take a look at this example of the twin truths of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility in the matter of SALVATION:

First we see man's responsibility here –

Christ has in the verses preceding these, once again preached the gospel, and called these men to follow Him. But his talk of dying, being lifted up on the cross repulses them, so they answer with a criticism, using as so many unfortunately do, the scriptures as their excuse for not believing. "***We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever***" It's hard to know for sure but they are probably referring to verses like Is. 9:6-7 "***For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.***"

Now to think that meant that the Messiah would not be lifted up is to ignore everything taught in countless other verses, Daniel 9:26 - Messiah will be cut off, Zechariah 13:7 – He will be struck, Psalm 22 – He will be pierced hand and foot, and most importantly Isaiah 53 He will be "led as a lamb to the slaughter". What scripture says is His exaltation and eternal reign could only happen *after* he had made atonement for sin by dying on the Cross and been resurrected on the third day.

But that's not what the Messiah, so like Wesley whatever those verses mean they can't mean He has to die. The Messiah we want is a Son of David, who will reign here forever. Starting Now. So who, Jesus is this Son of Man you say you are? Who do you think that you are? This is, in one sense of course, the critical question in all of religion. But He's already told them again and again. "I told you, and you do not believe." (John 10:25) They WILL not hear Him.

So instead Jesus once again warns them, they have only a short period of time left to enjoy the privilege of having Jesus "the Light of the World" with them. In essence in verses 35 & 36 Jesus repeats the call of Isaiah 55:6 "***Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.***" Because the time is coming when He will leave them, and they will seek for a Messiah not find Him. Jesus is telling the people of Jerusalem in these verses that his public ministry amongst them is coming to an end. And soon the light that they have rejected, will shine upon a people who have not had the privileges they have had, of having the scriptures, and the prophets, and the Temple, and the Messiah. A people who have been in darkness, in other words the light they have rejected is going to shine amongst the gentiles.

What Jesus tells them they *must do* while he is still with them is to BELIEVE in the light, that is BELIEVE IN HIM because ***He*** is the Light of the World. If they do not want to be eternally in darkness they must have faith in Him. Once they have believed, they pass immediately and forever from darkness to light, from death to life, and eternally become sons of light.

It is their responsibility to believe in Him, and if they do not, they will find themselves in darkness and have no one to blame but themselves, as Calvin says, "***Christ enlightens us by his Gospel, in order***

that we may follow the way of salvation, which he points out to us. For this reason, they who do not avail themselves of the grace of God extinguish, as far as lies in their power, the light which is offered to them."

But sadly they would not believe. Men think, if there are enough miracles and enough excellent teaching, men will just naturally believe. But here in the Gospel we have seen so many widely seen miracles, and healings, so many sermons, even raisings from the dead, all of them done by Christ himself and yet so little belief. Here is sad proof if we ever needed it of the fallen nature and darkness of the human heart. Here is evidence of our natural blindness, and dullness, and inability to see the truth. Something more is needed then if we are to believe and that is the Sovereign Effectual Calling of God. These men have heard the General Call to Faith, but they haven't had that Effectual Heart Changing work of the Spirit that open their eyes and ears and make them willing to believe, and without it, their hearts remain hardened opposed to the gospel. That is what John is getting at in these verses of Isaiah – He wanted his hearers to know why this happened. That's an important question. We look around the Christian church, and we don't expect to see a huge number of converted Jews. But that wouldn't have been the case at the end of the first century. The Christians would have wanted to know, why when the Messiah was a Jew, and came to the Jews, why when they had so much light, so many miracles, did they reject all of them? He wants us to know this didn't take God by surprise and was actually in keeping with the Old Testament prophecies, and sadly the practice of God's ancient people. Did ever any nation corporately see more and greater miracles than the Jews of the Exodus, and yet most of them died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. As Hoskyns sadly put it, *"the rejection of the Messiah by His Own people ought not to surprise those familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures."*

The clearest Messianic Prophecy in the entire bible, Isaiah 53, begins with the solemn question, "Who has believed?" (Isaiah. 53:1.) and the answer in keeping with God's purposes in Isaiah's time and the time of Christ's crucifixion is hardly anyone. That they didn't believe is linked to that question – "And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" because it is only to them whom he reveals his arm, that is his power, who will believe.

Jesus Himself confessed this in Matthew 13:13 *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

14 "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive'"

And in *Luke 10:21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.*

As he himself said, in John 6:44 believe is dependent not on the ability of man but on the power of God *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."* *Matthew 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."*

For instance, When Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus doesn't say to Peter, "Well done Peter, you've figured it out! I just knew you were the smartest fisherman in all of Galilee!"

Matthew 16:17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Again we can see the difference between the *General call that everyone hears and the Effectual Call that only God's chosen do in Acts 13:48* "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

All *heard* the gospel, but only those who had been appointed to eternal life believed it!

Faith, brothers and sisters is not something we accomplish, it is the gift God. If it were something we did, it would be a work, and something in which we could boast. We could pray "*I thank you God that when I was still dead in my sins in trespasses I still managed to exercise faith and come to you by my own strength.*" but in fact the truth is, the faith unites us to Christ is God's unmerited gift,

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

But do not think that the Spirit's effectual calling that draws us to Christ forces us to believe against our will, or that we remain the same as we once were. No effectual calling brings formerly dead sinners to life and makes them willing and eager to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q31: What is effectual calling?

A31: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

We are in God's time made willing to believe. William Romaine was a well known 19th century evangelical and a man who worked to promote a revival of Reformed theology in the Church of England. Once his wife was in the company of a very Arminian vicar of the Church of England at Tiverton, who knowing her husbands views spoke with no little zeal against what he called 'irresistible grace,' alleging that 'such grace would be quite incompatible with free will.' ***'Not at all so,' answered Mrs Romaine; 'grace operates effectually, yet not coercively. The wills of God's people are drawn to Him and to divine things, just as your will would be drawn to a bishopric, if you had been offered one.'***

Now the fact that God must draw us to Christ if we will come to Him, and He draws whom He chooses does not one wit mitigate the responsibility of all men to believe. As AW Pink wrote: ***"To sum up. The fact of man's responsibility rests upon his natural ability, is witnessed to by conscience, and is insisted on throughout the Scriptures. The ground of man's responsibility is that he is a rational creature capable of weighing eternal issues, and that he possesses a written Revelation from God, in which his relationship with and duty toward his Creator is plainly defined. The measure of responsibility varies in different individuals, being determined by the degree of light each has enjoyed from God."***

3 quick applications: 1) God's Sovereignty means that his purposes are not thwarted even by the evil unbelief of men, in fact, they are accomplished. Leon Morris points out that had the Jews *accepted* the gospel it is difficult to see how it could have gone out to all the nations. And certainly, for the

crucifixion to occur as God had determined, as Peter himself tells us, Christ had to be taken by lawless hands.

2) God's Sovereignty DOES NOT mean that the need for evangelism is not real and urgent, While Christ can tell the elect from the reprobate, you and I can't. All we can see is lost and dying people walking in darkness, who need to believe and be saved and as Paul tells us in Romans 10 – "Faith comes by hearing, And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Again and again, God warns against the sin of not warning dying men and women of their peril and telling them to flee to Christ from the wrath to come, As God said to Ezekiel, ***"When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand."***

3) But that urgency doesn't just apply to others, it applies to you. You have heard, yet again, the general call to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and heard once again the assurance that if you will do so, you will be saved. Your responsibility right now is to do so, and if you will not, then at the end of time, you will no more be able to blame God, than a starving man who refused the food that would have saved his life on the grounds that he detested it.

NKJ 2 Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

"The throne of grace will not always be standing--it will be removed one day, and the throne of judgment will be set up in its place. The door of salvation by faith in Christ will not always be open--it will be shut one day forever, and the number of God's elect will be completed."

Jer. 8:20 "The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!"

Ah but if you have, know that the same God who is the author of your salvation will also be the finisher of it. The excellent and pious James Durham, when on his deathbed, was for sometime under considerable darkness respecting his spiritual state, and said to his friend, William Carstairs; 'For all that I have preached or written, there is but one Scripture I can remember, or dare grip to: tell me if I dare lay the weight of my salvation upon it; "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.'" Mr Carstairs answered, 'You may depend upon it, though you had a thousand salvations at hazard.'