

*Why Can't They Believe?*  
John 12:36-43  
Reading: Genesis 1:26 – 2:3

Bethany Baptist Church  
May 30, 2021

**Explain preaching plan.**

*...pray...*

**Let's begin by reading this morning's text: John 12:36-43.**

Jesus finishes His three year public ministry with an *invitation* and a *judgment*.

*"Believe in the Light while you still have time."*

Then He goes into *hiding*.

The crowds *refuse* to believe in Him.

The Messiah God *sent* was not the Messiah Jerusalem *wanted*!

Next stop: *the cross*.

**In this morning's text, John examines why the Jewish nation *turned* on Jesus so quickly.**

1. (vv.36-37) **Startling rejection. But *who* rejects *who*...?**
2. (vv.38-41) **Divine sovereignty. They *can't* believe.**
3. (vv.42-43) **Human responsibility. They *won't* believe.**

## How was Jesus' *final invitation* received?

1. John records v.36 as Jesus' *final gospel invitation* to Israel. Israel's *last chance* to follow Jesus (first Advent) as Messiah.
  - a. V.38 – “*While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become children of Light.*”
  - b. Jesus spoke of *urgency!*
    - i. “*While you have the Light...*”
    - ii. This hint of *warning* makes it very *clear* that God won't *hold open the door* forever.
  - c. Jesus spoke of *invitation!*
    - i. “*...believe in the Light...*” The *Light of the World* is Jesus!
    - ii. The *necessity* of real faith is *huge* in John; it is the *condition* of salvation!
    - iii. 3:16 – “*whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”
  - d. Jesus spoke of *regeneration and transformation!*
    - i. “*...so that you may become children of Light.*”
    - ii. When you *believe in Jesus* (Light) you *become new* and you *act like it*.
2. Then Jesus abruptly *hid Himself* from the Passover crowds.
  - a. His *claim* to be the Messiah (Light) was on the table, His *invitation* to believe in Him was clear.
  - b. This concluded **three years** of *public preaching, doing good, changing lives, confronting hypocrites, and working signs* (John 1-12, etc.).

3. But now His *inviting*, followed by His *hiding*, was an act of **divine judgement**. *Why...?*
- a. Follow as I **read v.37**.
  - b. Despite three years of working *more signs than you can count* (though John highlights seven)...
    - i. ...*most recently* the raising of Lazarus from the dead...
  - c. (37.b) ...*yet they were not believing in Him*.
  - d. Which means they had *rejected* Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Because He **wasn't** the kind of *militant* Messiah they wanted.
    - i. They wanted a Messiah on a *chariot*, not a Savior on a *cross*; they wanted a Conqueror with a *crown*, **not** a Christ with a *crown of thorns*.
    - ii. Picture the *dramatic shift* that occurs here...!
    - iii. After the **Triumphal Entry**, when Jesus began to speak clearly about His *cross* and His *death*, the crowd *turned away* (**read vv.32-34**).
    1. "*Just what kind of Son of Man are you!?!*"

**Israel rejected Jesus, and Jesus rejected Israel.**

***How could that be!?! How could they not believe!?! John explains why the Jews can't believe. (Read v.38-41)***

1. John is going to cite the **OT** prophet **Isaiah** *twice* to explain that they *don't* believe because they *can't* believe. It's a matter of *divine sovereignty*.
2. Our author *first* appeals to **Isa 53**, the *Suffering Servant* passage, the **OT** clearest prediction of Jesus and His *death on the cross*.
  - a. **Please turn w/ me to Isa 53 (read v.1).**
  - b. Let's consider **two** key words: *believe* (1.a) and *revealed* (1.b).
  - c. 53:1.a – Isaiah begins by indicating that His message of God's Servant will *not be believed*.
  - d. 53:1.b – It goes on to ask *to whom* has God *revealed* the *Arm of the Lord*?
    - i. The “*Arm of the Lord*” implies God's strength *revealed & exercised* in His Servant (His Son Jesus).
  - e. As Isa 53 continues, **no one** will believe in Him because:
    - i. (v.2) *He has not stately form or majesty that we should believe in Him;*
    - ii. Thus (v.3) *He was despised and rejected by men.*
  - f. The Servant did **not** satisfy *earthly standards of majesty*. Jesus was **not** the Messiah Jerusalem was looking for!
3. So John has *established* that although God's message of a suffering Messiah is *true, clear, and validated in power*, very few *believed*.

4. Then John provides the *reason* they couldn't believe (**v.39** – *for this reason they could not believe*). He finds that *reason* by going back to **Isaiah** a *second time*, from an *earlier passage*.
  - a. **Vs.40** refers to **Isaiah 6:10**, a part of Isaiah's calling to the prophet ministry. John now applies this verse to the Jews' *rejection* of Jesus.
  - b. *Why can't Israel believe Jesus? God's judgment. Read v.40.*
    - i. God has *blinded* their eyes (despite seeing Jesus and His signs).
    - ii. God had *hardened* their hearts (despite hearing truths that *cut straight* to the thoughts and intentions of the heart).
    - iii. As a result of God's *hardening (judgment)*, they **could not/would not** *see, understand, turn and be spiritually healed.*
  
5. John summarizes (41) that Isaiah *spoke* because he saw an *exalted vision of the glory of Jesus* (6) and later predicted the *suffering of Jesus* (53).
  - a. Didn't Jesus say (8:56) that "*Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad*"?; (58) "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am.*"
  - b. If *Abraham* saw the glory of Jesus, why not *Isaiah*...?
  - c. **OBTW** – John's use of **two** Isaiah passages, one *early* and one *late*, confirms the *single authorship* of the OT *Book of Isaiah*.
    - i. Only one *man* wrote Isaiah – Isaiah son of Amoz.
    - ii. That *validates the integrity* of every one of its *amazing and inerrant prophecies*.

6. John has just used Isaiah to explain that Christ *hardened* Israel because Israel *rejected* Christ – the Suffering Servant.
- a. But that’s not the end of the story. **J. MacArthur** reminds us that God *brought good*, and will bring further *good*, out of Israel’s *judgment* (Romans 11).
    - i. God’s *hardening* of Israel *made a place* for the Gentiles to enter the Kingdom. **Rm 11:11** – *I say then, they [Israel] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them [Israel] jealous.*
    - ii. One day, Israel’s *jealousy* will finally bring them, as a people, to Messiah Jesus (Tribulation).
    - iii. **Rom. 11:26** – *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”*

**It is God’s sovereign right/judgment to harden sinner’s hearts.**

**Yet the Jews are an example of *human responsibility*. God sent them *Jesus*, but they chose *man*. (Read vv.42-43.)**

1. Jesus' adversaries were *hardened* under His judgment (v.40 – *He has blinded their eyes*).
  - a. *Nevertheless* (42), they were **not** *spiritual robots* – they bear *responsibility* for their judgment.
  - b. They willfully, intentionally *considered* Jesus, but ultimately were unwilling to *give up* what they really valued...*man's respect*.
  
2. *No less a class* than the leaders of the people (42) *weighed* Jesus' works and His claims, and found them *credible* – *believable*.
  - a. John goes so far as to say *many even of the rulers believed in Him*.
  - b. That seems *huge!* *Faith* is the prerequisite for God's *forgiveness* and *gift of eternal life!*
  - c. *Were these men truly saved!?!*
  - d. But John goes on to write that they *were not* openly *confessing Him*. Gr. Imp "*not confessing*" → *repeated* refusal to publicly acknowledge Him as Israel's Messiah.
  - e. *Why...? Fear!* If they *followed* Jesus the Pharisees would *excommunicate* them from the *synagogues* (centers of Jewish life).
  - f. "*What will people think of me? How could I sustain my position as a leader in the community?*"
  - g. So even though Jesus had just promised that the *Father would honor them*, they chose the *approval of men* rather than the *approval of God*.



3. Jesus said genuine faith includes *counting the cost*.
  - a. These men did indeed *count* the cost, but they chose the *glory* of men over the *glory* of God.
  - b. And as Israel's leaders *turned from Jesus*, the crowds and the nation *turned* with them.
  
4. As you hold these two truths together (*sovereignty & responsibility*), there is a dynamic that God *hardens* the hearts of those who persistently *reject* Him.
  - a. **Wm Hendriksen** – *He is the God of love. He is not a cruel monster who deliberately and with inward delight prepares people for everlasting damnation. On the contrary, he earnestly warns, proclaims the Gospel, and states – as Jesus did repeatedly during His earthly ministry – what will happen if people **believe**, also what will happen if they do **not**. He even **urges** them to walk in the light. But when people of their own accord and after repeated threats and promises, reject Him and spurn His messages, then – and not **until** then – he hardens them, in order that those who were not willing to repent may not be able to repent.*
  
5. The Jews of Jesus' day *judged* Him and *hardened their hearts* against Him.
  - a. They were completely *responsible* for their unbelief.
  - b. But as John points out, Christ also *hardened their hearts*. And their *hearts remain hard* until this day.

**Human responsibility** – “they loved the approval of men rather than God.”

**Divine Sovereignty** – “for this reason they could not believe...He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart”

Both are *true*, and there is certainly *divine mystery* involved.

And there is also *clear* warning!

Are you *consumed* with the approval of your friends? Afraid of their *disapproval*?

God’s approval is *far greater*.

Are you *putting-off* confessing Christ?

Time runs out!

“**While** you have the light, **believe** in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

...pray...

“O Great God”